Interfusion

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Interfusion

by TreacleA

Summary

After the fall, Hannibal awakes in a VA hospital bed in New Orleans with no memories. Will is somewhat conflicted about that.

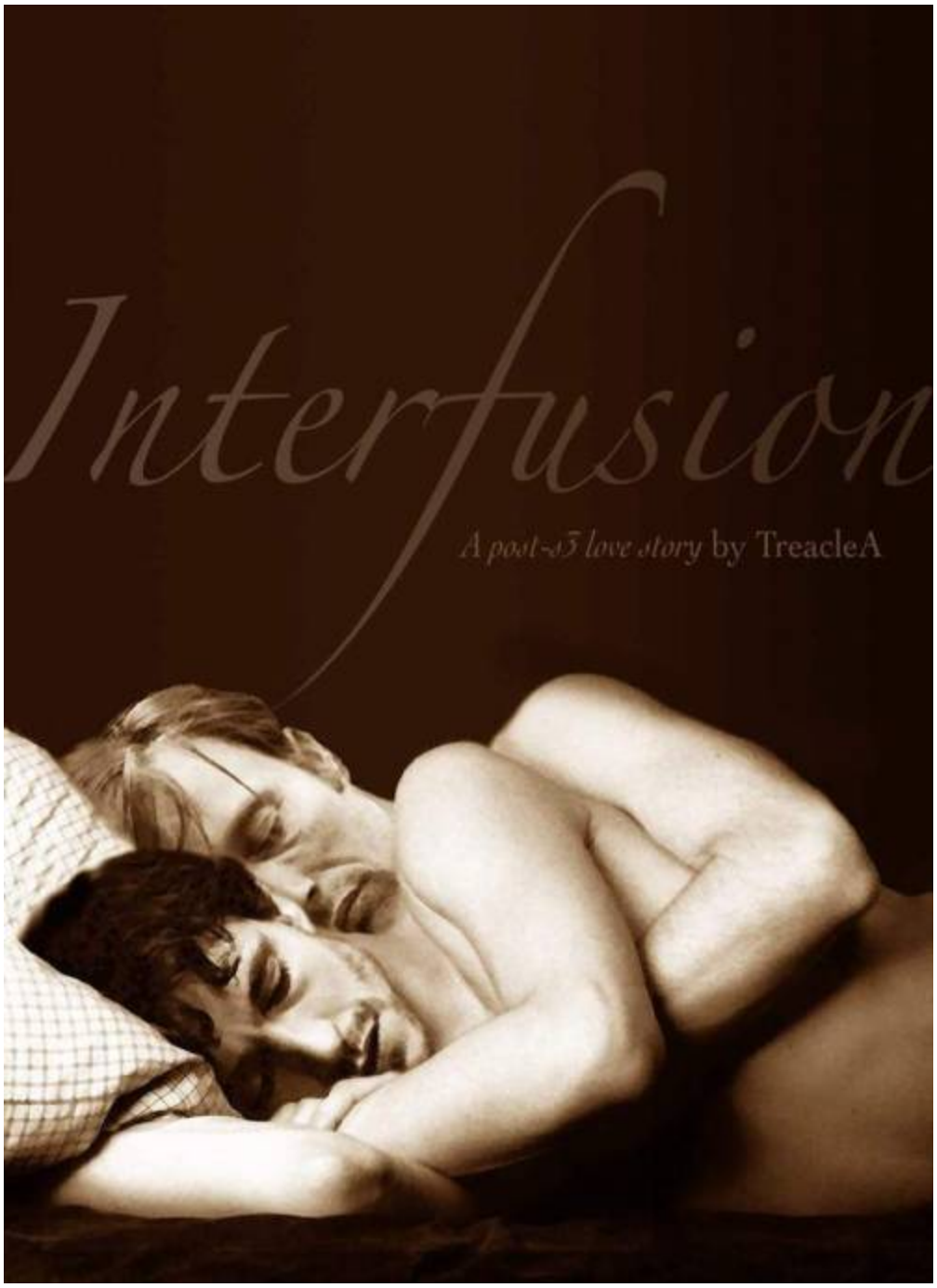
30 Day Fic Writing Challenge

It's no excuse, but I wrote this in 30 days, a chapter every single day, and it was quite the discipline I can tell you. That said, I'm not sure whether it shows. There may or may not be some sloppy storytelling, and mistakes that I didn't pick up on as I read it through and hastily posted it. But I still like it, and it totally scratched my Amnesiac!Hannibal itch.

Notes

See the end of the work for notes

Things We Carry



Interfusion
/ɪntəˈfjuːʒ(ə)n/
verb

to intersperse, intermingle, or permeate with something.
to blend or fuse, one with another.
to pour or pass between, into or through.

The sensations that he becomes aware of as he slowly wakes from sleep are not unpleasant ones, just a little different to those he remembers as being usual. Rather than simply opening his eyes, feeling refreshed, he instead feels like he's floating slowly to the surface of water, or more precisely as if his face is gently breaking the surface of a pond on which sunlight is shining. Water still beading on his lashes.

At first the light in the room around him is just white, intense glare that seems to be reflected back from every surface, then - as his pupils adjust - he begins to make out shapes. A curve of cream towards his feet, the dove grey surface of a wall, a rectangle of bright turquoise blue. A large window to his right is at first a glaring panel of light, before slowly dimming to reveal the detail of blue sky and clouds outside.

Shifting his gaze minutely sideways, he tries to focus on the objects there. The glowing dark square of a monitor, undulating lines bisecting the display, the cables trailing down toward him. Moving his eyes downwards, he sees the vague beige shape of his right hand resting on the cotton blanket, his index finger crowned by a pulse oximeter which, as he carefully, painfully flexes his hand, he can just feel the pressure of.

Slowly, he draws in a long shallow breath.

There is no pain, just stiffness, as if he'd slept badly in one position for too long and his limbs have fallen asleep. Stretching his awareness out like fingertips inside a glove, he experiments, wriggling first one set of toes then the other, shifting the fingertips on both hands. The heavy weariness of his limbs is extreme, and suddenly he knows with a deep uneasy certainty that his body has not moved from its current position in a very long time. The long muscles in his legs and arms feel beyond weak, they are atrophied from lack of use and will not support him if he tries to stand, and the reality of his weakness and vulnerability grips at him with a cold hand.

There had been an accident.

He had been hurt badly and has been unconscious for some time, maybe even comatose.

His bones and skin have mended but his body had wasted, which had to mean a long period of inactivity, possibly even weeks.

Conclusions come to him quickly, solid feeling, like bricks he could begin to build with, and setting them down alongside each other in his mind he searches around for more.

And finds nothing.

No memory of an accident. No idea of where he is. And when he tentatively reaches out further, searching for what else he knows with certainty, nothing but fragments. Tattered pieces that - as he seeks to examine them - melt like snowflakes. Snatches of classical music, voices, glimpses of rooms: a vaulted ceiling, a dark, damp cellar, all of them swirl and refuse

to allow focus. A feeling of panic begins to rise in him, and drily he works his throat to form a word.

"Water."

It's barely a whisper, but beside him the slow steady beep of the monitor jumps in response, the numbers climbing fractionally upwards. Rubbing his hand against the coverlet, he presses against the oximeter with his other fingers until it slips from his fingertip. A moment passes and then the machines at his side burst into shrill noisy life.

On the left of the room a shape appears, moving quickly with authoritative purpose across the end of his bed and towards his right. As she moves in close his eyes focus on the round golden-brown face of a woman, a nurse, her eyes calm and curious as she reaches to reset the monitor before looking down at his hand. Slipping the oximeter back onto his fingertip, she raises her eyes to his face, before assuming a look of surprise.

"Well hell! Look who just woke up!"

Her accent is rich, deep and warm and unmistakably Southern United States. Raising a hand to his forehead she touches soft fingertips to his skull. The sensation is strangely intimate, and he realises with a start that his hair had been cut very close to his head.

"You know where you are honey?"

Blinking his eyes rapidly, he moves his head. Tiny movements, back and forth on the pillow. Nodding with a look of understanding, his nurse presses a reassuring hand to the side of his face.

"You're in the VA Medical Centre in New Orleans. You were in an accident back along, and your nephew brought you here. You been away from us a while."

Her hand cups the back of his skull,

"You want I should get you some ice chips to suck on? Wet your throat?"

He makes a sound, a soft hum of approval, and stepping away she exits the room.

The sounds from outside bleeds in through the open door, a low complex chatter that feels strangely familiar. A tannoy makes an announcement, someone speaks on the phone, a baby cries. Lying on his back, he feels blanketed by it, a comforting wall of noise that he knows he must have listened to subconsciously for weeks.

The noise subsides as his nurse returns and allows the door to close behind her. Her hand returns to the back of his skull, a firm reassuring presence.

"OK, just let them melt in your mouth now. It's been a while since you swallowed anything."

The ice chips feel sharp on his tongue and then the cool slide of liquid down his throat feels incredible. Closing his eyes in bliss, he swallows rustily, swallows again, and his nurse

chuckles.

"Good, right? Just wait till you're allowed juice."

Gentle and slow, she feeds him the entire cup of ice chips, like she has all the time in the world, and as she smiles and sets the beaker aside he feels a warmth expand in his chest for her.

"I'm gonna go call your nephew now. He's not far, so he'll be over in no time. I'll let him answer all your questions," she winks at him, "I'm guessing you have a few."

Returning her gaze, the man blinks back at her in sudden fear and confusion, and knows instantly by her face that she sees and understands it all. Laying a hand over his, she gives her a head a little shake.

"He's a real good boy. Been here most evenings," she nods her head towards the turquoise chair at the foot of the bed, "Sits over there and reads to you till we kick him out. You're real lucky to have him. Not everyone has family cares like that."

She leaves him to make the call, and after a moment his eyes move to the chair.

A book lies on it, closed with a scrap of torn paper protruding from between the pages, and although he can't clearly see the title he recognises the cover like the face of a beloved friend. It's a book he knows he carried with him everywhere at one time, a late 60s French paperback edition of Baudelaire's *Fleurs du Mal,* its spine cracked and edges well-thumbed.

And before he can understand where it had come from, a memory flickers to golden life behind his eyelids.

The glimmer of dappled sunlight on water, and his own bare, brown feet extending to dip toes beneath the clear surface. On his lap is the Baudelaire, pressed open with one slender young hand while the other breaks off pieces of fresh apricot boconotto to transfer to his lips. A soft warm breeze blows, ruffling fine straight hair around his face, and tucking the ends of it back behind his ears, he smiles.

The image is so perfect, so charged with serenity and happiness, that as it fades from him his eyes brim with tears for its loss.

He closes his eyes and sleeps, and sleep is a grey colourless room filled with faded shapes and faceless people, whose voices are simultaneously familiar and strange.

An Open Door

When he opens his eyes again, a man is sitting in the chair.

His forehead is resting in the palms of his hands, the fingertips pushed through his dark hair pressing into his scalp, and his body is hunched forward in a position that looks simultaneously tense and terribly weary. Unable to think of anything to say, the man in the bed simply watches him in silence until the other lifts his head. The myriad of emotions that cross his face in that first moment are impossible to decipher, but finally his expression settles on simply stunned.

"I didn't believe it when they called me."

He still hasn't moved, his body is perfectly still, the tension in it evident in every line of him. Long seconds draw out between them and then he seems to gather himself.

"How do you…feel?"

His tongue stumbles over the words as if he realises how ridiculous the question sounds, but his eyes are serious, intense. He badly needs an answer. Clearing his throat, the man tries to formulate an honest response.

"*Confused*," he manages.

His voice cracks over the syllables, and frustrated, he glances at the water beside him. Without a word his companion rises from his seat and steps towards him. Lifting the cup, he guides the straw between his lips, and watches intently as he takes a couple of sips. He can't help but notice that the hand holding the beaker is trembling slightly.

"What do you remember?"

Cloud blue eyes are fixed on his own, and the emotions in them swirl like a storm at sea, one moment there's anger, the next hope, the next weariness. It's exhausting just to look at him.

"Nothing. Except…" he pauses, remembering the book, "Is that my Baudelaire?"

The younger man's face registers surprise, then the tiniest flash of amusement. Glancing over at it, he nods,

"It is. I've been reading it to you."

"The nurse said."

"They let me stay late sometimes. I don't usually finish till nine, and…" his voice trails off and he frowns, "Did you hear me reading it?"

He badly wants to be able to tell him 'yes', see something other than anxiety in those eyes, but after a moment he shakes his head. Watches as something like embarrassment flits across

the other's face before being quickly hidden away.

"Why am I here?"

He tries to keep his voice steady, but he knows that the uncertainty that he's feeling had bled through in his tone. Setting the cup back down, the other man inclines his head a little, his eyes curious.

"You mean in New Orleans?" He breathes out softly, "It's kind of a long story. And I'll tell you it sometime, I promise. Just know that if anyone asks, your name is Michael Vincent Graham and you've been living off-grid in a cabin in Mississippi for the last eighteen years. And that you served your country with valour."

He casts his eyes down to the floor, a small smile on lips, and after a moment of watching him the older man ventures another question.

"Your uncle?"

The other man gives a nod,

"My dad's younger brother. No-one's seen hide nor hair of him since '98, but I'm pretty sure he's not going to be walking into a VA hospital any time soon. Last time I spoke to him he told me he was being monitored through a chip in his head the military put there. Said he had to stay away from cell towers."

He hesitates for a moment, and then lowers himself until he's sitting beside him on the edge of the bed. Closer like this, he notices the thick dark-pink line of a recent scar bisecting his right cheek, and seeing him looking at it the younger man tilts his chin.

"What do you think?"

He rubs a hand slowly through his beard and over the raised skin,

"I've kinda gotten used to it already. Old lady in the bodega the other day told me it was rakish."

His mouth twists in a smile, and the small change in expression fills him with a sudden warmth. He likes this man's smile, his sad blue eyes. His voice. Everything about him seems acutely familiar, and yet he when he reaches around inside his mind he finds that he has no idea what their relationship to each other is.

"You told them here that you were my nephew?"

The dark-haired man's eyes narrow slightly, his lips parting.

"You needed proper care and it seemed like the easiest way to get it. You couldn't stay where you were, and I figured New Orleans was somewhere I knew how to get lost in," his brow creases, "I was a cop here, remember?"

He knows the look on his face betrays him, and after a second or two he sees the other man get it, his eyes widening fractionally in surprise.

"You *don't* remember."

His body moves forward a little, eyes searching his for something. Looking back into his face, the man in the bed feels suddenly exposed and naked, as if his mind were a door being prised wide open. Then, as if sensing his discomfort, the dark-haired man draws back, his throat clenching as he swallows.

"What *do* you remember?"

He blinks, and the tattered fragments in his head drift and flutter away from him as they did before.

"I remember a chapel. And music. Bach," his lips twitch and he hesitates, "I remember reading the Baudelaire by the water, eating pastries. I think perhaps I was in Italy."

The other man's eyes darken, green blue to deep sapphire.

"How about me?" He seems to be holding his breath now, "Do you remember me? Do you know who I am?"

His face is study of curiosity and anxiety, shoulders impossibly tense as he awaits his answer and reluctantly he shakes his head at him in response.

"I…no, I'm sorry. I don't."

He opens his mouth and again feels the awful open exposed feeling, the sense that he is laying himself completely at this other man's mercy.

"I can't remember my own name."

The dark-haired man's eyes are locked on his face now in an expression of complete disbelief. Leaning back, he breathes out slowly. A long minute passes in which all either of them do is look at each other in silence, then finally the other man speaks.

"My name is Will Graham, and all you need to know right now is that I am your friend. I am your *only* friend. Who you are though is something it isn't safe for you to know yet. You're just going to have to trust me on that one."

Faces In The Street

It takes Will less than forty-eight hours to persuade the hospital staff that he can be discharged into his care. His nurse - Tonice - is the most vocal opponent, despite asserting that she trusts Will and that she's *sure* that he's prepared for *everything* caring for an invalid will entail. Her insistence that he takes his uncle's vitals daily and logs them with his doctor brooks no argument, and he watches as the younger man wearily reassures her for maybe the third time, although not without genuine warmth.

"You've taken real good care of him here, and we both appreciate it. But he can come home now. I want him to."

Tonice's frown is overlaid with skepticism, and she turns to look at him for a sign that she has nothing to worry about.

"Michael, you feel ok about this? You'll be too weak to get out of bed, be relying on your nephew here for everything for a while. Is that what you want?"

Clearing his throat, the man who is not Michael Vincent Graham exchanges a glance with the man who is definitely not his nephew, and then nods.

"If Will feels he can care for me at home, I trust his judgement," he gives her a faint smile, "And I imagine that being in…familiar surroundings may aid my recovery."

Tonice still looks uncertain, and not for the first time a little curious.

"You stayed with your nephew before?"

"He means familiar things," Will's smile is tight, forced, "We're used to each other. And I know how he takes his coffee."

Tonice grimaces,

"Absolutely NO coffee, Mr. Graham. Your uncle had peritonitis, he needs to be real careful what goes through his gut for a while. You got the diet sheet right?"

And Will nods, grins,

"Yeah, yeah I got it. And no coffee I promise. Just healthy home-cooked meals and plenty of rest, ok?"

They take him to the house in an ambulance. It's an unremarkable but neat detached place in the district of the city called Tremé, wooden clad with a small front yard that's been walked grassless by the four dogs that stand in it. Side by side, they watch with curious brown eyes as he is transported through the front door and into a downstairs room that's been

meticulously prepared for his arrival. The floor is smooth scrubbed hardwood, smelling of beeswax and new wood, and on the table by the bed sits a jug brimming with golden Cassia Alata.

Lifting him onto the bed, the two paramedics busy themselves with re-linking his IV and checking his vitals, while Will stands in the doorway. The expression on his face is indecipherable but he's clearly watchful, his eyes tracking the movements of the two medical professionals as if he's merely biding time waiting for them to leave. When they finally turn to go he's careful not to show it, politely offering them both a cold beer maybe because he knows they'll turn it down.

As he sees them both to the front door, the man in the bed allows his eyes to move around his room for the first time. A few feet away is a bookshelf filled with books, some of which are instantly familiar to him, just as the Baudelaire was. On the bottom shelf is a pile of drawing materials: several pads of expensive paper, a wooden pencil box, a set of watercolours. All things he feels immediately drawn to, as if the other man understood that art supplies and books would all be comforting items for him to have near.

The front door closes and after a moment or two, Will appears again in the doorway. They regard each other silently for a minute. In the end it's him who speaks first, and asks the question he's been waiting to ask for two whole days.

"Who are we to each other?"

Will's eyes darken fractionally, and he shifts a little in position.

"I told you before. We're friends."

The man raises his eyebrows and he moves his gaze pointedly towards the bookshelves.

"Half the books on that shelf are mine."

"How do you know?"

"The same way I knew the Baudelaire was," he looks back at him and frowns, "Why do you have them?"

The other man shrugs, and there's that same fleeting trace of embarrassment again, like he's been caught whispering a careless endearment.

"Call it nostalgia. I took them from a place we used a spend a lot of time in together. A place I felt safe. They reminded me of that."

"Of safety?"

Will tilts his head, almost a wince.

"Of the illusion of safety," the blue eyes come up and rest on him again with an intensity that he finds a little unsettling, "It wasn't something that lasted that long."

There's a noise from the hallway outside and then a reddish brown shape appears in the doorway alongside him. Looking down at his dog with amusement, Will gives a faint huff of laughter.

"Might've known you'd be the first one to come and visit."

His hand reaches out and carelessly scratches at the shepherd-mix's ears, but the dog's expectant eyes are firmly fixed on the visitor to the house.

"Sorry Winston, he won't have sausage for you this time."

The dog whines softly as if he understands and then moves forward, crossing the room to stand at the side of the bed. Quietly he lays his muzzle on the sheet by the man's outstretched hand, and after a moment or two he lifts his fingers and gently strokes it.

"He knows me."

Will is watching them both, seeming curiously affected by the sight.

"They all do. You were always sweet to them. They trusted you."

"You too."

That earns him a sharper look, something closer to suspicion.

"Why do you say that?"

He tries to shrug, and the gesture makes his shoulders ache. Like the muscles there haven't been moved in a long time.

"The way you look at me."

He presses his lips together, because it's more of a feeling than anything concrete.

"You look at me as if I betrayed you somehow. Like you're waiting for me to do it again."

Will's face is suddenly intense. At his sides, both of his hands have balled into fists and for a second he looks as if he would strike him if he could. Surprised, the man moves back against his pillows.

"I'm sorry. I don't mean to upset you," he swallows, "I confess I'm struggling to understand anything that has happened to me, and as Tonice rightly said I am wholly reliant on you. And as you seem somewhat *reluctant* to share what you know…all I can do is guess."

The other man's jaw moves in a tight tense motion, and the hands at his side flex.

"It's not *reluctance*."

He breathes out, and his posture sags a little against the doorframe.

"It's fear more than anything. If I tell you, and you start to remember, then everything will change."

Watching the shifting emotions in the other man's face, the man in the bed hums in understanding, but instead of comforting him the sound brings a expression of anguish to Will's face.

"Don't do…that. I just…I don't want you to be…you just yet," he shakes his head, "I thought I was ready, but I'm not."

He eyes are cast down towards the floor, and after a moment or two he turns away. The sound of his footsteps recede down the hall and then the front screen-door opens and slams closed with a loud bang.

Outside his window the afternoon sun is bright and golden, and through the gap in the curtains the man can see people walking along the sidewalk outside. A woman and her small daughter stroll hand in hand, their faces turned up towards the winter sky with smiles, and as they pass by out of sight he realises with a sudden stir of surprise that he has no idea what his own face even looks like.

Mirror

He sleeps again and dreams that he is running in a forest.

Ahead of him a young girl with fair hair laughs as she winds her way between the trees, and her voice is like a bird's, high and clear ringing out through the hollows piled deep with dead leaves. He runs until his lungs burn and his legs ache, but somehow she is never any closer and when he finally wakes, his body is filmed with sweat.

The daylight outside has dimmed a little, and from somewhere else in the house he can hear the faint sound of a radio and the clatter of pans. The unmistakable smell of chicken browning in butter brings saliva rushing to his mouth, and without warning his stomach makes a sound that is tantamount to a groan. Lifting his head from his paws, the shepherd mix by his bedside gives him a quizzical look before padding out of the room to investigate on his behalf.

After what seems like an age, he hears the sound of footsteps and then Will appears once again in the doorway. The white t-shirt he'd been wearing earlier has been exchanged for a flannel shirt, the sleeves of which have been carefully rolled back, and in his hands he carries a bamboo tray.

"Winston told me you were up," his expression is mild, friendly even, "Feel able to eat something?"

Before he can formulate a reply his stomach answers for him and Will grins lopsidedly,

"Figured as much. I remember waking up feeling like I could eat half a…"

He stops speaking mid-sentence and the unspoken words hang in the air like cloying smoke. His own memories that he isn't willing to share yet.

Stepping over to the bed, he sets the tray down on its stand over the other man's knees, and unfolds the napkin. Steam wreathes from the bowl, and inhaling it the man in the bed gives his head a tiny shake of appreciation.

"This smells delicious."

Will makes a small wry sound that is not quite a laugh,

"You have *no idea* how ironic you saying that is."

The soup is a clear broth filled with intense flavour, barely suffering from the necessary absence of salt, and carefully tasting each mouthful he has to stop himself from sighing with pleasure at the taste. Watching him, Will's expression is unreadable again, and after a moment he pauses in his eating to speak.

"I had a dream I was in a forest."

The other man moves his head absently, as if he's only half listening.

"Yeah? Anyone with you?"

He nods, "A little girl. We were running."

He takes another sip of the soup, but the spoon feels suddenly impossibly heavy in his hand and his grip falters. Noticing, Will takes it from him, dips it into the broth and then blows over the surface. It's such a strangely intimate gesture he feels his chest tighten in response.

Holding his gaze, the other man brings the soup spoon up to his lips. Keeps his eyes on his mouth as he swallows it.

"You had a little sister when you were a boy. Mischa. Maybe it was her."

"*Mischa?*"

The name feels like something golden on his tongue, and the sound of it drops into him like honey into hot milk. Yes, Mischa. That was her name. He can hear himself calling out to her now, warning her to slow down, to look out for rocks. Watching his face, Will dips the spoon down into the broth and brings it up again.

"You remember anything else?"

He begins to shake his head, but then realises something,

"We were not speaking…english."

The other man's eyebrows rise a fraction, and for a second he seems to be considering whether to offer any response. He fills the spoon again.

"You were born in Lithuania. You lived there until you were sent away to school in Paris. I think you were maybe fourteen or fifteen. You speak at least four languages fluently that I know of, maybe five," he grimaces, "Actually I even heard you speak Arabic to a bellhop once, so that may be a low estimate."

They make their way through the rest of the bowl, Will tipping it to make sure to get the last spoonful. When it's finished he hands him the napkin, and lifting it to his mouth he wipes his lips.

"Can I see my face?"

Will's eyes go wide. The hand holding the tray grips it tight enough to send his knuckles white, and he presses his lips together. Despite his reaction, the man feels strangely calm.

"Do you imagine that my seeing my own face will break the spell?"

The other man sucks in a small tight breath, his expression a mixture of fear and wonder, and then he nods a little self-consciously.

"Like something from a fairytale."

They both smile and it's an odd feeling, as if Will himself were suddenly the mirror he's been asking for. Fleetingly he wonders if he even wants to look, if he could just be content never to see himself again, only know himself through this other man, and then Will is bringing him the glass and setting it on the nightstand beside him.

He doesn't turn his head right away, but he's already aware of the shape moving in his peripheral vision. A blur of grey and pale beige that sends his heart jumping to a faster rhythm. Is his hair grey then? His skin pale? Swallowing a lump of nervous fear in his throat he holds Will's eyes for a long moment and imagines he sees something comforting there, a confidence that he can draw on, and then slowly he turns his head.

The face that looks back at him is a complete stranger.

The first thing he notices is his eyes; bright golden brown set within sockets he imagines are far more shadowed than they healthily should be. And the next thing is the scar.

Reaching his hand carefully to his head, he traces the line of it from just above his hairline on the right side over the curve of his skull. It's around three inches in length, a barely healed gash that isn't that dissimilar to Will's own scar, only just covered by the half-inch of silver-grey hair that covers his scalp. Rubbing a hand over it, he frowns.

"You looked so odd when they shaved your head."

Will's voice sounds hollow and far away,

"I don't know why but it reminded me of a kid's book I read when I was small. Where a lion gets his mane cut off."

The man nods, thoughtfully. Touches the edges where faint suture marks show.

"They opened my skull?"

"You had a build up of pressure on your brain. You'd hit it pretty hard and for a while afterwards you seemed ok, but then you started to…" he moves his hands, "Zone out? You diagnosed yourself. Told me where I needed to take you and what I should tell them. But it look longer than we'd thought. By the time I got you to a hospital and into surgery the swelling was really bad. They had to go in to relieve it."

His voice is soft and weary, as if retelling the story takes a huge amount of effort, and glancing at him the man hesitates before asking another question.

"The nurse mentioned peritonitis?"

"You developed an infection from a wound in your abdomen, you didn't tell me how bad it was. I think you'd been treating it yourself. Ignoring the pain," he squints, "You're really

good at doing that."

"A wound?"

His hand trails down his right side to the spot he's been only vaguely aware feels different to the rest of his body. Tighter and warmer. He pushes a hand up carefully under his t-shirt and runs his fingertips over the thick knot of a scar. Beside him, Will's eyes move to follow his motion.

"You got shot."

Slowly, his lets his eyes return to the face in the mirror. It's a hard angular face, the cheekbones highly pronounced, the sharp jaw softened only slightly by the heavy beard that's been allowed to grow over it. Rubbing his fingers through the hair he traces the area under his mouth, the curve of his lower lip, the bristles there feeling rough and unfamiliar.

"You want to shave it off?"

Will's tone is careful, and looking at him he sees caution there.

"You imagine it makes me harder to recognise."

The other man's eyebrows lift in surprise, and he gives a small laugh.

"Uh yeah. You have…kind of a distinctive face. It's definitely…helped with that."

He nods, understanding something finally, and unease twists like small snakes in his chest.

"People would recognise me. They would know my name?" He frowns, "What is my name Will? If I were to walk out on the street now, would anyone I meet be able to tell me? When I don't even know myself?"

The other man stares at him, and the blue in his eyes seems to intensify until it's almost luminous. His throat contracts and he swallows thickly, and it's like he's releasing a breath he's been holding for days.

"You're name is Hannibal. Your name is Dr. Hannibal Lecter, and you're currently ranked number 2 on the FBI's 'Most Wanted', although they recently amended your entry to include the fact that you are - hopefully *permanently* - presumed dead. So please believe me when I tell you that - aside from me - no-one else can ever know it."

This Road

"I pulled us both over a cliff."

Will's voice is calm and even, and his eyes on him are steady. It's as if by giving him his name he's given himself permission to tell him everything now, and that it's a huge relief for him to do so. His hands folded in his lap, he leans back against the footboard of the bed and watches him for some kind of reaction. But finding himself somewhat unsurprised, Hannibal only nods.

"Was it a very high cliff?"

Will snorts,

"*Very* high. I didn't expect us to survive, if that's what you're asking."

Hannibal lifts his chin fractionally,

"And yet we did."

"We did," Will looks down at his hands, laces the fingers together, "I didn't quite count on your uncanny ability to always avoid certain death. Or my piggy-backing on it."

He sighs softly and continues,

"You caught the worst of the fall on the way down, but when we hit the sea you were the one dragging me. Even with a gunshot wound and your head cut open. I'd fractured my wrist, fucked up my lower back pretty bad, I must have been a deadweight. Somehow you got us both to the shore, even found a house nearby we could shelter in for the night."

Hannibal tilts his head. Will's voice has softened and there's sense of wonder to his words, as if he can still barely believe what happened to them was real.

"In the morning you made me call Bed…" he hesitates, his jaw clenching, "You made me call a woman you knew would help us. A doctor who you said wouldn't let anyone know where we were."

"*You* didn't trust her though?"

Will laugh is hollow and dark,

"Only ever about as far as I could throw her. I didn't want to do it, but you were still losing blood," he lifts a hand to touch his own shoulder, his face, "And these weren't exactly just scratches. I figured you had to know what you were doing."

One of the other dogs trots in from the yard, a white and tan terrier type, and they both watch him as he makes his way over to the bed to flop down alongside Winston. Taking a scrap of

the chicken flesh left at the bottom of Hannibal's bowl, Will tosses it to him and the dog catches it with a snap of his jaws.

"This woman, she didn't betray us?"

The dark-haired man shakes his head, and his mouth is set in a grim line.

"No, she didn't betray us. She patched me up, brought you 3 or 4 units of blood, some morphine for the pain. Even offered to be your go-between for papers to get you out of the country," his lips stretch thinner, "She was *really* keen to help you with that one."

"Papers for me?" Hannibal's eyebrows lift, "Not for you?"

And Will shakes his head, frowns.

"She knew I had to go back. If we wanted them to really believe you were dead I mean," he looks down at his hands again, "And she knew I didn't want to. That's why she called Molly."

His face is pained now as he twists the ring finger of his left hand almost unconsciously, and even without him saying another word, Hannibal instinctively understands who 'Molly' is to him.

"Your wife."

Will sighs again, and the sound is filled with all the sadness and guilt that his face is already betraying. Laced over the top of it though, is a generous smattering of anger.

"She knew once I heard her voice that I'd have to speak to her. Make up some story to explain what happened, something that wouldn't break her heart for a second time. After that, I think everything else happened just as she'd planned it."

He shrugs,

"I went to the FBI, told them I'd crawled ashore and laid injured for the last 24 hours before finding help. Made a full statement, telling them I'd seen you go under. Took them to your cliff house where we'd…" he frowns, "I showed them everything. Then I just…went home. Made out like I was just relieved it was all finally over, and that I couldn't wait to return to my normal life."

Hannibal watches him curiously. Will's voice has turned bitter, and the nervous movement of his hands has increased. From the floor, the terrier makes a tiny sound of concern, and his master darts him a look that instantly silences him.

"And I stayed behind alone in the house? Undetected?"

And Will's eyes snap up to meet his, hard and cold.

"Not alone, no. With *her* there to look after you. You made sure I knew that."

The air between them seems to crackle with some invisible energy, something that seems almost to vibrate and heat the air. Silently, Hannibal looks into Will's face, trying to understand what it is that he sees there, but the emotions are too conflicted to make any sense of. The younger man seems to be waiting for him to say something, offer an explanation for actions he has no memory of, but after a minute he shakes his head hopelessly as if realising that nothing will come.

It's a long time before he speaks again, and when he does his tone is noticeably more subdued.

"It lasted exactly six days," he grunts softly, "We didn't even make a full week. One afternoon I came home from fishing and my bags were on the porch. She'd just written a note, taken Max and Harley and gone to her mom's. They were always Wally's favourites."

Hannibal's brow creases with sympathy. The emotion in Will's voice is evident, and despite not knowing exactly what had transpired between them, he knows genuine pain when he sees it and waits respectfully for him to continue.

"I remember packing up the truck, getting all the dogs' stuff together, and all the time telling myself that I had *no idea* where I was going. That I was homeless, rootless, that I'd lost everything. I drove to the end of the road and I just sat there at the junction with the engine running. And on one side of me was the road back east, and on the other was the road west, and when I looked inside there was no part of me that wanted to go the other way."

The blue eyes come up to meet Hannibal's again, and this time the look in them almost takes his breath away.

"There was no part of me left that wanted to be anywhere that you weren't."

He stops speaking, and for a moment it seems as if he might get up and leave. His shoulders and arms are rigid with unreleased tension as he watches Hannibal's face, tracks the movement of his eyes, as if searching for a sign that he's been heard and understood. And unable to think of anything to offer him, the older man simply shakes his head.

"Will. I don't know what to say."

And to his great surprise, the other man gives a sudden, loud, unexpected laugh.

"That's exactly what you said to me when you opened the front door," he pushes a hand jerkily backwards through his hair, "Although I'm pretty sure you'd been expecting me. Bedelia though…not so much."

"My doctor friend?"

Will grimaces,

"She isn't your friend Hannibal. Bedelia never does anything for anyone that won't benefit her in some way. I think she enjoyed having a little power over you for a time, as payback, or maybe she was hoping she could work off a debt, I don't know. I do know she

could have killed you if she'd really wanted to, and she chose not to," he shakes his head ruefully, "I'm not sure I'll ever fully understand why."

He straightens a little. His hands are quiet again now, the look of anguish having disappeared from his face, and for a moment he looks almost at peace.

"We stayed there for a while, but you weren't getting any better. I wanted to call Bedelia to come back, but you said not to. I made the plan to come down to New Orleans and use my Uncle Mike as your cover when you started to get worse. I drove almost sixteen hours straight. You held out till around Hattiesburg."

At their side the two dogs lift their heads as he goes silent, their eyes shining expectantly. Perhaps it's close to their usual walk time or their dinner, either way their attention is as firmly fixed on Will as Hannibal's is now, all of them wondering what comes next. And after a minute Will notices and when he smiles at them, both their tails thump the floor.

"I need to get them their supper."

He stands, lifting the bamboo tray and the dish as he does so, and before Hannibal can think about what he's doing he reaches for his hand. The slight flinch as his fingers brush the other man's knuckles is barely noticeable, but when he sees it he feels an odd ache in his chest in response.

"Will…" he starts to say, and then realises he doesn't know what comes next. As if he understands though, the younger man just nods, smiles at him softly, reassuringly.

"It's ok," he says, and Hannibal's hand drops away back to the sheet. "Just try and get some rest now. We'll talk again later."

Aftermath

He doesn't sleep again, although for a long time he lies with his eyes closed waiting for sleep to come. There's a restless twitching in his limbs now though, and he finds himself moving his feet and hands continuously against the sheets, flexing the muscles in his forearms and calves carefully, trying to work out how much strength is actually in them.

He bends his knees and draws his legs up slowly under the covers, and each one feels like a lead weight. He lowers them back down and then repeats the motion a few more times, and the effort of doing so makes him break out in a sweat. Frustrated and exhausted, he lets his head fall back against the pillow and stares upwards at the ceiling for a while. There's a heavy water-stain on the paper that someone has tried to paint over, and the edges of it as it spreads across the surface remind him of the coastline of Norway. A place he doesn't even know if he's ever been to.

When the light starts to go, Will comes in and turns on the lamp on his nightstand and closes the sash window. He doesn't seem surprised to see him awake, and after he's checked on his IV and cannula he sits down on the edge of the bed again and looks him in the eyes with an easy smile.

"Gotten used to coming in and reading to you in the evenings. Kind of strange to be out of my routine."

Hannibal's cheeks flush with warmth. For some reason the idea that Will read to him while he was unconscious is particularly affecting, and for a moment he struggles with knowing what to say in reply.

"Is that something you'd like to continue?"

The words fall out of his mouth without warning, and then he surprises himself further when he realises just how badly he wants to hear Will say 'yes'.

Narrowing his eyes a little, the other man regards him with a mixture of amusement and suspicion.

"I thought you said you didn't hear me?"

Hannibal tilts his head,

"I didn't. But I should like to now."

Will's lips twitch with the hint of a smile, and his forehead furrows. Leaning forward towards the nightstand, he picks up the dog-eared copy of the Baudelaire and turns it over in his hands.

"I'm not sure I could deal with the criticism of my accent, now that you're alert enough to make one," he grins crookedly, "Would you mind if we switched to something a little less demanding?"

"Whatever you feel most comfortable with, Will."

The dark-haired man's head jerks at that answer, and abruptly the smile leaves his lips. Rising, he walks over to the bookshelf and stands looking at the volumes, and as the silence stretches out between them Hannibal senses that something has subtly shifted in his mood.

"Did I say something to upset you?"

Will make a soft sound like a grunt, and turns his head sideways.

"You just…you sounded a little too like the old you there for a moment. It reminded me of…"

He stops and then turns to him a little more fully, his expression darkly sardonic.

"As you've probably worked out by now, ours hasn't been the smoothest of friendships. We…" he hesitates, "There are a lot of scars. Literal and figurative. It wasn't that long ago that I had myself convinced that I would never see you again. That you were no longer a part of my life."

"I had hurt you?"

"It's not as simple as that."

Will looks away, out the window into the darkening street.

"I didn't like who I became when I was around you, when we were around each other," his lips thin into a line, "And at the same time, I knew that I was never more myself."

His hand fidgets at his side, pulling at his pants leg, and he looks down. The room has grown dimmer since they've been talking and he is stood in shadow now - the soft angles of his face hidden from the glow of the lamp - and Hannibal can't help but admire him. His beautiful soulful face and sensitive mouth, vulnerable and at the same time so strongly guarded against him.

"Was that why you pulled us off a cliff, Will?"

He tries to keep his voice soft, because he badly wants to know the answer,

"Was what you had become so very terrible?"

And Will's eyes move back to him as if pulled by gravity, wide with surprise.

"*Terrible?* No…Jesus, no. Don't you get it? It wasn't terrible *at all.*"

His lips part and the smile that pulls at the edges of them is a thing of delicate beauty,

"It was the best I'd ever felt in my entire life."

He stares at Hannibal in silence, and the other man feels an ache begin in his chest that slowly grows and radiates outwards. It has the quality of sadness and loss, much like the feeling he'd had when he heard Mischa's name, but this time the feeling is sharper, all the more painful because he has nothing *solid* to attach it to. Nothing except the face of the man looking at him as if he desperately wants him to be someone else. Will's lower lip appears to tremble and his eyes shine with emotion,

"I think that's the hardest part of any of this," he shakes his head tightly, "That you don't remember…*that*."

He looks hopeless now, sad and fractured, and Hannibal badly wants to make it better. Laying his hands flat on the coverlet, he sighs softly.

"I am trying Will. It may be that my memories will return," he blinks at that, "I seem to know a little about how this works - without fully understanding *how* I know. My brain has been quite damaged, and at present I cannot gain access to the files that I need. However, the fact that I dreamed of my sister, of my youth? That should give us hope. It could be that once the swelling has fully subsided the synapses will begin to mend themselves. After all, it has only been a short time since…"

Will makes a small sound in his throat, and looking at him in surprise he sees an expression of anguish on his face.

"Hannibal. It's not been *a short time."*

Stepping over to the bed, he lowers himself down to sit on the mattress again.

"By the time they were done with the surgery on your brain, the peritonitis had gotten so bad they were worried the pain might finish you off. They made the decision to put you into a chemical coma while you recovered, but when the infection finally cleared and they tried to bring you round…you wouldn't come back."

He shakes his head,

"I sat around for days, just going back to the motel to sleep, feed the dogs. I kept thinking I'd walk in the next morning and you'd be awake, but there was nothing. You lay there breathing, your heart was beating, your monitors were telling me you were still alive, but you were…somewhere else."

He looks up at the wall, out the window,

"So I waited. I figured if you'd been willing to wait three years for me, I could give you a few weeks at least."

Slowly he lets his eyes move back to rest again on Hannibal's face. He seems to be studying the lines around his eyes, the shape of his mouth, with an almost wistful look, as if he is trying to decide if, like the contents of his mind, they have changed as well.

“You were unconscious for almost four months,” he says quietly.

Very Loud

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

As Hannibal's eyes open the next day, his very first thought is that the sounds of morning in Will's neighbourhood are quite the most fascinatingly diverse collection of noises he has ever heard. The next thought however, is a far more peevish one. That the men collecting the garbage pails have no *real need* to shout their conversation back and forth across the width of the road, and that - were they to attempt it - it would not be impossible for them to avoid the earsplitting clang made as they drop each can back to sidewalk.

Turning his head to one side, he drags his hand up to press the pillow against his upper ear and muffle the sound, but it makes little to no difference. And then, as if to add insult to injury, another noise is added to the mix from inside the house: the unmistakable high-pitched snarl of a coffee-bean grinder from the kitchen. Sighing, Hannibal lets his hand drop back to the coverlet, and instead of fighting it tries instead to allow all the noise to form a kind of discordant music instead.

He's almost managed to convince himself when the door to his room bangs open, and the small tan-and-white terrier bursts through in a flurry of fur and tongue. Behind him in the now open doorway, Will stands holding his tray,

"Sorry. Afraid Buster doesn't know the meaning of the word stealthy."

At his side, the shepherd-mix and another two smaller dogs hang back from the threshold. Looking down at them sternly, Will makes a sound with his tongue and all three obediently retreat, followed a few moments later by a suitably chastened looking Buster. Stepping inside, their master gives them all a quelling look and pushes the door shut with his foot.

"I'll try and keep them out of here. Just give me a call if one of them gets in and starts bothering you."

Setting the tray down on the nightstand, he turns to look at him. There's a long weighty pause, and then he gestures to the pillows.

"You want to sit up?"

His bottom lip catches between his teeth, and there's no doubt he's more anxious this morning. After their conversation had finished the previous night, he had seemed exhausted and emotional, as if retelling the story of the last four months had drained him completely. Now it very much seems as if he's suffering from a kind of vulnerability hangover, raw and wary of exposing himself any further.

Keeping his eyes on him, Hannibal gives a small nod and does his best to shuffle himself forward as Will rearranges the pillows. It seems like it should be an entirely prosaic act, so he isn't at all prepared for the jolt of sensation he feels when Will wraps his arm around his

shoulders, splaying one hand wide on his belly to support his torso. Grunting with the effort, he allows the other man to pull him upright - his dark head dipped so low that his breath warms his ear - and then falls back against his pillows with a sigh.

Will's hand on his bicep lingers a fraction longer than it needs to, fingertips trailing, and when he looks up at him he is frowning slightly.

"Does it frighten you to be so weak?"

Hannibal's breath catches in his throat. The look on Will's face is so transparent, so full of carefully hidden fear, that his throat constricts with empathy.

"It feels…strange," his mouth softens in thought, "It's an interesting experience, to be so limited. And so reliant on another."

The other man expels a soft breath of a laugh, and there's a warmth to the blue of his eyes now that feels almost tender.

"I should have known you'd choose to see this as some kind of a growth experience."

His lips quirk and the hand on Hannibal's arm drops away,

"Wish I had your positive outlook."

Watching him, the other man waits patiently until his eyes meet his again.

"Does it frighten *you*?"

And Will's eyelids flicker downwards, a tremble of movement,

"It terrifies me," he says.

He stays with him as he eats breakfast, allowing him to feed himself for the first few minutes as he did the previous evening, before silently taking over. There's no back-and-forth between them, just an unspoken, intuitive understanding of just how much strength Hannibal has and when it is time for him to rest.

Afterwards, Will takes the tray away and brings in a basin of hot water, soap and a cloth, and again there are no words. Hannibal finds his breath becoming more and more shallow - his eyes on the ceiling - as the other man carefully washes first his arms and neck, and then his torso beneath his t-shirt, with a gentle firm efficiency that leaves him in no doubt that he has done this before. Many times. So many that he maybe no longer even considers it a particularly intimate act.

As he finishes washing his legs and feet he pauses, and seems to fully realise for the first time that Hannibal is awake and watching him. Folding the cloth over in his hands, he opens his mouth and then closes it again before speaking.

"I uh…usually wash all of you," he half grimaces, "Somehow that never seemed even *remotely* strange before today."

His skin still tingling from the touch of Will's hands, Hannibal can only nod his understanding, clear his throat.

"Whatever it was before, our relationship is a different one at present. Perhaps we should allow ourselves some time to grow…accustomed to each other again? Before falling back into any old habits."

Will gives a bark of a laugh, and a mixture of amusement and incredulity crosses his face. Dropping the soapy cloth back into the basin, he shakes his head with a grim smile.

"I love that my continuing to wash your dick is a habit we should be sensitive about. Not at all concerned by old habits of mutual violence and bloodshed."

He leaves him for a while, and after a half hour or so come back to open the sash window again. The air outside is strongly scented with gasoline and the smell of garbage from the earlier truck lingers, but there are other scents there too. Ones that are far more pleasant and intriguing. The faint smell of frying fish, the delicate hint of ozone that heralds a coming storm, asphalt and tyre rubber. Drawing the blind, Will looks out and up at the sky, seeming to consider something for a moment before he turns to look at him.

"You want to go out?" he says.

It takes him only ten minutes or so to unhook the IV and catheter and transfer the bags to the hooks on the back of the wheelchair the hospital left them with. It's not a modern chair by any means, but when Will has carefully hefted him up and into it, he's surprised at how comfortable it is. The cushioned backrest supports the weakened muscles in his spine far better than the pillows on the bed do, and pushing back against it Hannibal gives a little sigh of relief as the ache there eases.

Outside the air is bright and cold, although it's obvious from the few signs of green the trees along the sidewalk are exhibiting, that Spring is definitely in the air. Dressed warmly in a thick sweater of Will's and wrapped in his blankets, Hannibal can still feel the chill though, and after a few hundred metres Will notices. Stops and adjusts the coverings, wraps his legs a little more thoroughly.

"This was a dumb idea," he says a little tersely as he resumes pushing, and Hannibal makes a noise of admonishment in reply.

The excursion isn't a particularly interesting one, just a short journey to the local bodega so Will can buy a few groceries, but as they make their way back towards the house Hannibal finds himself warm with pleasure at the experience. As they pass the last house on the corner someone is playing a piano with the window thrown wide to the street, and as Will stops the chair Hannibal lifts his head to listen in delight.

“Do you know this piece?”

Will’s voice is soft and careful, and to his surprise he finds the answer is on his tongue instantly, can almost see the black branches of the notes as they spiral out across the sheet music in front of him.

“Bach’s Fugue in D Major.”

The sound of the music falls like blessed rain onto his upturned face, and as Will begins to push them onwards he smiles to himself.

“Più fortissimo però,” he says softly, and behind him Will gives a soft laugh.

“Ever the critic,” he says.

Chapter End Notes

The sheet-music instruction to play a section of music 'fortissimo' translates as 'very loud'. Hannibal's comment on the pianist's rendition of Bach's Fugue in D Minor is "Più fortissimo però" - "More 'fortissimo' though."

Shoes

As Hannibal still cannot remember any of the details of the life he lived before the fall, he has nothing whatsoever to compare his day-to-day life with now. Despite the lack of any contrast material though, he finds himself struggling to imagine an existence for himself in which he might have felt better cared for.

After their initial outing, Will makes the trips out in his chair part of their regular routine and although the weather is sometimes less than balmy, Hannibal soon finds himself looking forward to four o'clock each day with an inexplicable impatience. Will has not said it explicitly, but he knows that at some point in the not-at-all distant future he'll have to return to the trolling motor shop he's been working at the last three months, at which time Hannibal will most likely be left alone for most of the day. Will has hinted darkly at the idea of employing a live-in nurse for him, although so far he hasn't done anything but talk about it, and it seems likely that he's every bit as uncomfortable with the idea of sharing their personal space as Hannibal is.

It's with a particular agenda in mind then, he supposes, that Will appears in the doorway at the end of their first week together wearing a t-shirt and sweats, and carrying a brand new pair of Nikes. Looking up from the book he is reading, Hannibal takes in the whole ensemble with slow deliberation before giving him a suitably quizzical look,

"I think perhaps running shoes are a little premature, don't you?"

Will's eyebrows lift in mildly sardonic reply, and tossing them on the bed he pulls the covers from Hannibal's legs.

"You need a flat sole, with good arch support. They'll help your balance."

Bending down, he pushes one arm behind Hannibal shoulder blades, and then holds out a hand. It's a different approach to his usual one, but after a second's pause the older man places his palm against his, wrapping his fingers around Will's wrist and allowing him to take his weight and pull him forward. And then he sits, a little breathless, as his chair is pulled in alongside the bed.

"Ready?"

Will doesn't wait for a verbal answer, just his tiny nod of acquiescence, and then they move together, transferring his weight smoothly from the surface of the mattress into the seat of the wheelchair. Dropping to his knees, Will takes the right shoe and rips open the velcro before gently easing it onto his foot, and Hannibal can't help but raise an eyebrow with a expression of mild disdain.

"Are you sure these are the best choice?"

Looking up at him, the younger man's face cracks wide in a grin.

"Seriously. If Freddie Lounds were here with a camera right now, she'd have an aneurysm."

"Perhaps Ms. Lounds would also find the sight of you knelt at my feet equally as worthy of her lens."

Will snorts, and then raises his eyes again with a look of curiosity.

"You remember anything about that name?"

Hannibal hums absently, as he pushes the other shoe onto his left foot.

"Not especially."

"You said *Ms*.Lounds. It's what you always called her."

He fastens the velcro across the front of the shoes, and the older man points his feet downwards, flexes his toes inside. An image of something drifts into his mind and then out again almost immediately, before he can begin to grasp at it.

"Does she have very red hair?"

Will's eyes narrow, and reaching forward he grasps Hannibal's ankles with his hands, his fingers pressing into the bone.

"*Yes*. What else?"

Another frame appears; this time a table and a perfectly white porcelain dish covered with freshly-cut vegetables, a pale, almost birdlike face bent over it.

"She's vegetarian?"

Will laughs, a great loud sound of surprise and relief, and leans backwards, his grip on him tightening fractionally. His cheeks are flushed and eyes bright as he watches Hannibal's face, and then when nothing else comes, he ducks his head with a kind of excited self-consciousness.

"Good. That's really good. And…" he stops, "We can talk about it more later, see if anything else comes back. Right now though, you're coming with me."

The backyard of Will's little house is enclosed by a large fence and overhanging trees and is, for all intents and purposes, almost as private a backyard as it is possible to get in a city the size of New Orleans. Despite that, Hannibal can't help but feel self-conscious when he sees what Will has placed in it. A set of parallel bars - firmly secured to the ground and surrounded by crash mats - stands in the shadow of a magnolia tree, and pushing his chair

over to them Will turns to look at him with an expression that suggests he is fully expecting an argument.

"Will…" he begins to say, and then stops. Because the other man's lips are set in a firm line that he knows is nothing but a cover for the fear he is hiding underneath. Fear that Hannibal will never recover. Fear that someone he *needs* to be his equal will continue to need all his support. And fear that soon he'll have to leave him home alone, unable to even use the bathroom by himself.

Taking a deep breath, Hannibal drops his chin to his chest, braces his neck and pushes downwards with his hands. The effort it takes to move himself even half an inch from his seat is horrifying and within seconds he's pouring sweat, but then suddenly Will's hands are under his arms, his torso pushed up against his side, moving him bodily forward until he's stood between the bars. Wrapping his arms around his body, he steps forward, letting Hannibal's forearms drop to rest on the bars and take a little more of his own weight.

"Bring your feet directly under your hips," he says tightly, and then helps him move them with little shoves of his own until they are both standing upright, chest to chest, with the older man's thighs braced against the other's for support.

The effort of keeping himself upright is massive, and Hannibal can feel little rivulets of sweat running down his temples and down the thick sinew of his neck into his shirt. Panting a little, he allows himself to lean forward against the younger man a little more, until his chin is resting against the curve of his neck. Will's arms around his sides tighten fractionally, and he feels the motion of his throat against his cheek as he swallows.

He closes his eyes. And suddenly he is somewhere else.

A grey green room: a kitchen. Stainless steel and the bright coppery smell of blood thick in the air, cloying in his nostrils. And Will is in his arms again, braced against him, his breath ragged and laboured, hair plastered wet to his head and smelling of the rain.

He feels his own hand against his soft warm belly, thick with something hot and wet and he pulls him still closer, a pain as he's never felt before tearing through his own chest, pulling tears from his eyes, closing up his throat. Sadness and fury combining in a beautiful, awful embrace.

He looks down and his hand is at Will's belly again, his fingertips pulling his shirt upwards even as the other man tries to stop him. Lays fingers over his, makes a shushing noise, like he's comforting him.

"No, don't…don't..."

And then the scar is there in front of him, a silvery echo of the wound he'd just felt, *just seen himself make in his body with a curved claw of a knife*. He looks and looks, and there's no

part of him that doesn't understand.

"I did this," he says, and gently Will covers his hand with his own.

"I told you before. Literal and figurative."

"But I did this. I *saw* it, just now. *I felt it.* I loved you, and yet I still did it."

And Will nods his head, eyes shining. Leaning his forehead against his, he presses his hand down harder, laces his fingers through his until both their fingernails are pressed into the soft knot of the scar tissue. Until he can feel every ridge of where it has healed.

"Why do you think I forgave you?" he says.

Nothing

For the rest of the day, Hannibal stays in bed.

Fatigue permeates him with a weight that feels barely tolerable, turning his muscles and bones to stone and forcing him to lie motionless until his strength returns. After his revelation in the garden though, Will seems loathe to leave him alone, and after shutting the dogs out and changing them both into clean clothes, he climbs onto the bed alongside him and stretches out in a mirror image.

Turning his head fractionally sideways, Hannibal looks at him in profile. His clear blue eyes are open, staring at the ceiling, and watching him he feels something twist in his gut: a bittersweet echo of the emotions he'd felt for him in his vision. Will turns to him, sad and serious, and he hesitates before asking him:

"Will you stay with me while I sleep?"

The younger man's eyes track the lines of his face, and then he nods.

"I'm not going anywhere," he says.

Hannibal breathes out, relief inexplicably flooding his body, and then like a wave rolling over him, exhaustion overtakes and he falls into sleep.

Lately, it seems as though the landscape of his dreams has become increasingly more textured, faces and locations he can question Will about if he remembers them when he wakes. Often the other man has an answer for him, some new piece of information that forms another piece of the scattered puzzle, and sometimes he doesn't and Hannibal is left to wonder at the significance of what he has seen. Who the mysterious players are in his internal psychodrama.

Sometimes his dreams feature killing, although for some reason in those he is always a spectator watching himself, never participating in the first person. Separated as he is, as an uninvolved observer of his actions, he finds himself fascinated by how little he is affected by the sight of violence. The objective part of his brain tells him that he should feel something - horror, disgust, excitement - but when he checks his body for a response there is nothing there but calm acceptance. Nothing but the slow rhythmic beat of his heart and regular breathing. Because this is who he is. He is a man who kills other men, and that is an intrinsic truth he seems to have no problem integrating.

Today though, when he dreams of killing, it is not only himself he is watching. In the centre of a darkened auditorium a single spotlight shines on the figure of man: tall and impressively muscular, his posture and the carriage of his head showing with perfect clarity what he is: an apex predator. His profile is sharp and hard like a reptile's, and when he turns his head to the

side - displaying himself - Hannibal can see that a deep scar completely bisects the flesh of his top lip in a permanent snarl.

Stepping noiselessly through the shadows, he watches him with a kind of wilful expectation - as he imagines an audience member at the Coliseum might have watched gladiators - and then slowly, with a dawning realisation, he becomes aware of who it is he is truly waiting for.

On the opposite side of the space he *senses* rather than sees another person, and knows even before light touches him that it is Will. Moving virtually unseen in the darkness, it's as if his movements mirror his own, and that each step he makes in his circling is reflected perfectly simultaneously. He closes his eyes and feels the connection between them stretch across the void, like wet red sinew pulled to its limit, and suddenly - where before there was nothing - a fist-sized core of heat has formed and is building in his chest.

Will speaks, and the voice he hears inside his head is utterly unlike that of the man he knows,

"Together?"

The almost-feral fierceness of his tone sends heat pulsing through his solar plexus, pushing blood and energy out to the ends of all of his limbs. The feeling is indescribable, powerful and energising, and every inch of his body feels alive and thrumming with the knowledge that he is paired in this moment with one person who truly knows and sees him.

They rush inwards, and in the moment of culmination the figure that was their prey becomes nothing but heat and bone and muscle that they must rend and tear in order to reach each other. Hannibal's fingers close over Will's upper arms, and their skin meets in a weltering wet slide of hard muscle and desperate, almost animalistic sounds of need. The sounds are still resonating deep in his throat when, heart pounding, his eyes spring wide open in the bed.

At his side, Will is rolled over watching him, a slight flush in his cheeks. His fingers rest lightly on Hannibal's upper arm.

"You were uh…dreaming," he says, and the flush deepens slightly, "I didn't know whether I should wake you."

Hannibal's body feels suffused with heat, and arching his back away from the sweaty bedsheets, he becomes suddenly aware that his dream has left him in a very obvious state of arousal. The linen sleep pants Will earlier dressed him in cling damply to his thighs and hips only accentuating his obvious erection, and breathing out raggedly, he pushes his head back against his pillows.

"No, it's fine. I was…"

He somehow wants to lie, to tell Will he can't remember what he was dreaming of, that this is just his body reacting to returning somatic sensation, new electrical impulses firing in his brain, but the memory of his dream is too real. Too immediate and raw to deny. So instead, he turns his head to look at him,

“I was dreaming of us killing together."

And then watches as Will’s lips part, and the intense blue of his eyes increases. The column of his throat contracts, and Hannibal finds his gaze drawn to the shape of it, the soft dark hairs that cover his Adam’s apple, that edge his perfectly sculpted jaw.

“And what was *that* like?”

His voice is soft and controlled but the flush is still there in his cheeks, an obvious counterpoint to the paleness of the rest of his face, and Hannibal breathes out in wonder looking at him.

“Enthralling. Exhilarating. Amongst other things.”

Will’s pupils widen fractionally, and the ghost of a smile touches his lips.

“Yeah. I think I can see just how *exhilarating* it was.”

He doesn’t move his eyes downwards to make his point, but the meaning is clear, and holding his gaze Hannibal’s lips press together is a mute echo of his smile. The fingers on his arm flex and gentle, a thumb stroking downwards over his bicep.

“I’m not entirely sure how I feel about that, if I’m honest. Although I guess it’s comforting to know you’re human in yet *another* respect,” he arches an eyebrow, “Albeit one with pretty atypical turn-ons.”

“Atypical? Or aberrant?”

Will rolls back onto his back and makes a sound that isn’t quite a laugh,

“You’d have to ask someone who doesn’t fit *both* those descriptors like a well-tailored glove.”

Hannibal smiles, and the warmth that has filled his body pools and settles in his core. He closes his eyes and brings to mind the image of his dream again: his dark mirror opposite him across a void of darkness, the shape of their kill stood like a sacrificial lamb awaiting them both on an altar of light.

Enthralling. Exhilarating. Intoxicating. Arousing.

“And beautiful,” he adds silently, inside his head, “Also beautiful.”

Anywhere In The World

The next day is fine. Maybe the first truly fine day they've had since Hannibal came to live in Tremé, and when Will brings in his breakfast at 8am there's no disguising that the better weather has partially lifted the cloud he's been dwelling under for the last week. His hair still damp from the shower, he chuckles under his breath as Zoe and Ellie dance around his feet on his way to Hannibal's bedside, only shooing them away when Ellie stands upright on her hind legs to see what the tray holds.

"She loves oatmeal. I fed her mush made with pinhead when I first got her. Her jaw was crushed and she couldn't chew right."

Hannibal grunts good-humouredly,

"She looks well fed enough now."

And Will grins, pushing an arm behind his shoulders and wrapping the other carelessly around his middle to pull him upright.

"You calling my dog fat, Hannibal?"

As has become his custom, he sits down on the bed to watch him eat, a mug of steaming charcoal black coffee between his fingers, and after he takes a couple of casual sips, he speaks.

"I thought maybe we could go on a drive today."

Hannibal's hand pauses in its journey from bowl to mouth, and he looks at the younger man in mild surprise for a moment before continuing to eat.

"Where would you have us go?"

Will shrugs casually,

"Just…out. Just drive somewhere. It's a beautiful day."

Something about the bright evasiveness of his eyes tells him that the younger man is harbouring more of a definite plan than he's letting on, but smiling inwardly to himself Hannibal decides not to inquire further. It warms him to see Will so cheerful, mischievous even, and despite being terribly curious about his intentions he's more than happy to remain ignorant if it means enjoying the sight of his smile.

If he's hoping that Will's choice of clothes for him might offer a clue, he's out of luck. Pulling him into yet another set of grey cotton sweats and his PT Nikes, Will hunts for several minutes in his own room before returning with a lightweight charcoal sweater for him to put over the top. Allowing him to pull his arms through the sleeves, Hannibal waits until he meets his eye before giving him a questioning look.

“Might I suggest a third layer if we’re to be outside for any length of time? Until I gain a little more weight, I imagine I’ll still feel the cold.”

Will grunts,

“I’ve got a windbreaker you can borrow if It gets too much. It’s in the truck.”

Trying his best not to react to the word ‘windbreaker’, Hannibal turns himself towards the edge of the bed and folds his hands in his lap,

“It seems you’ve thought of everything,” he says.

Will doesn’t bother to hide his grin as he pulls the chair closer, and after their customary moment of silent preparation he pivots him off and onto the seat. The air outside is a pleasant sixty degrees or so, and pushing him over to the passenger side of the Subaru, Will opens the door and checks the footwell is clear before repeating the action in reverse. The step up into the truck is a little tricky, and he has to brace his hip against Hannibal’s and lift first one foot in then the other, before completing the move. The whole endeavour leaves the older man somewhat breathless, and Will stands at his side watchfully until he is sure he’s fully recovered before he reaches in to fasten his seatbelt.

They drive east out of the city, and for the first hour or so Hannibal is content just to gaze out of the open window. Portchartrain lies as flat as glass as they pass over her, and then as they enter Mississippi the road gives way to green for a while, mile upon mile of dogwood and maple interspersed with the occasional magnolia, the scent from which sends his eyes closed with pleasure. As they pass over another meandering stretch of river, Will taps his arm to draw his attention to his side of the truck, and points out two stunning rose-splashed waterbirds flying just alongside them.

“Roseate spoonbills,” he says, and the happy grin that stretches across his face is many times more lovely to Hannibal’s eyes than the graceful birds.

They drive on for another half hour or so before he sees the younger man checking roadsigns, glancing down at the truck’s odometer. Sipping ice-water from the flask they brought along, Hannibal sees a large sign for a town on the highway to the right, and as they turn off for it he looks at Will questioningly.

“Ocean Springs?”

“Uh huh.”

Will’s smile pulls at the corner of his lips, and shooting a sideways look at Hannibal he nods towards the road up ahead.

“Round here is where I spent a good chunk of my childhood. Maybe the longest time my dad had a steady job, working for a friend of his from Biloxi owned a boat-building yard. It was good pay and Jean was good people, his whole family were,” he grunts thoughtfully,

“Maybe the most stable couple of years of my life here, playing with his dog round the yard while daddy fixed-up motors.”

He stares out the windshield, and as the highway rolls out ahead of them, the slow dawning look of recognition as he sees the town approaching is a sight to see.

“There she is,” he says softly, as they reach the far side of the river, and shifting down through the gears he slows the truck to a crawl as they enter the pretty suburbs.

The town sprawls, like he imagines so many little towns in the deep south do, and after driving around for a while the many lovely streets begin to look much the same. Leant out the window, Will’s face is an indecipherable mix of emotions and after twenty minutes or so of staring he darts a guilty glance over at Hannibal, as if he’d almost forgotten he were there.

“Sorry. This must be kind of dull for you. I just haven’t been back here in a while. It feels strange to recognise so much.”

His face looks curiously young and open suddenly, and finding himself utterly charmed by this new side of Will, Hannibal shakes his head.

“Not at all dull. Although perhaps you might cast your mind back and try to remember somewhere that served good local food and may still be in business? What might the traditional dish of ‘Ocean Springs’ be?”

And Will grins warmly, the blue of his eyes reflecting the ocean,

“You’re so going to wish you hadn’t asked me that.”

The afternoon sun is warm and yellow and starting to dip towards the trees when they finally finish their meal, and stretching out his arms above his head Will yawns as if the mere act of eating not one but two platefuls of fried catfish has thoroughly exhausted him. The white t-shirt he’s wearing rides up over his belly at the movement, and wiping his mouth with his napkin Hannibal finds his eye drawn again to the scar there, even as Will - following his gaze - lowers his arms.

“We should get going,” he says, and glancing at his watch, he frowns mildly. “Although traffic on the i10 will be hell coming in till six at least. Maybe leave it an hour or so before we start back.”

Looking out towards the ocean, Hannibal hums agreement. The boats moored out in the bay make a pretty picture against the setting sun, and shielding his eyes he tries to make out what they’re doing out there.

“Want to go see my old house?”

Surprised, he turns back to looks at Will’s face and finds him looking both expectant and a little anxious. His forearm resting on the table rolls against the wood, fingertips tapping out an uneven rhythm, and understanding something suddenly, Hannibal nods.

"Is that why we came here?"

"Maybe. I don't know."

Will looks down, and the dark curls that cover his head fall forward to hide his expression,

"I had an idea I wanted to come back here and see it some day. And that I wanted you to be with me when I did."

He looks up, and the deep violet shadows under his eyes do something painful and constrictive to Hannibal's chest.

"Then we should go there," he says, because he really doesn't trust himself to say anything else.

The little wooden house is set back a ways from the beach, on a road that's mostly overgrown now and scattered with burst tyres and fly-tipped metal, although it's clear to Hannibal when Will draws the truck to stop in front that it was very likely once a pretty spot.

Sitting in the driver's seat looking out at it, Will's forehead creases in a frown and his hands flex loosely against the steering wheel for a while, as if he's trying to decide whether to get out or not. Several long minutes go by - the only sounds the soft tapping of the truck's engine cooling down and gulls crying out in the bay - before he clears his throat softly.

"I hated it here," he says, and Hannibal nods.

"Hated the town. Hated the people. Hated Jean. Hated my daddy…"

He laughs once, dry and painful, and the sound seems almost to crack his throat,

"Maybe the only damned thing I didn't hate was that dog. And he was a mean son of a bitch. Bite you soon as look at you."

He presses his lips together, and the frown deepens even as he starts to smile.

"We'd spent all my childhood moving from place to place, never settling, never having my own room, my own yard, and then we finally do, when I *finally* have somewhere to be, all I could think about was that I wanted to be somewhere else. Anywhere else. Anywhere else but here."

He sighs, a tiny tremulous sound that might have seemed sad if it weren't for the look on his face that told a different story: relief and surprise. Like a cloud finally passing over the sun. Turning the key of the truck, he lifts his chin as the engine roars back to life, and then he turns to look at Hannibal.

"OK. Let's go home," he says.

Stars

Hannibal knows that Will has something that he doesn't want to tell him the moment he enters his room the next morning.

It's later than they usually have breakfast, but the long journey the day before had so exhausted him that - by the time they'd finally gotten home - he'd been asleep in his seat. As a result, the transfer from the truck to the chair and then onto the bed had had to be completed largely using brute strength, and after helping him get reasonably comfortable Will had immediately bid him a rather guilty-looking goodnight.

This morning however, he looks less guilty than he does anxious, and after giving Hannibal his breakfast he stands rather than sits down with his coffee as he usually does and looks out the window.

Finding himself ravenous after all the exertion, Hannibal is halfway through his eggs before he observes that the younger man seems quieter than usual.

"Sorry. Got some stuff on my mind is all."

Will gives him the sort of smile that he imagines would be reassuring, if it wasn't for the fact that Hannibal can read his micro-expressions like a book. Thumbing the handle of his coffee cup, he stares down at the floor at his feet, almost seeming to look through Winston and Zoe stretched on the rug beside him.

"With so little on my own mind, I'd welcome hearing it," Hannibal lifts his fork to his lips, "Unless it's something you'd prefer to keep private?"

Will frowns, and the dogs stir restlessly as if they sense his emotions. Wrapping his hands around his coffee cup, he raises his head and looks at him.

"I got an email from someone. A man we used to know. He retired last year not long after we…after we left Baltimore. I thought he'd moved away from the city, maybe gone abroad, but he's back there again. Apparently. "

He pauses, shakes his head,

"I don't even know what he wanted really. Maybe just to see how I'm doing."

His voice is calm and even, but Hannibal can sense the current moving underneath the surface, a disturbance in his energy that feels significant. Setting down his fork, he leans back against his pillows and regards him steadily.

"You thought of this man as a friend?"

Will gives a small terse nod,

"Friend. Boss," he wrinkles his nose, "Shot me once. Arrested me for murder. Although to be fair, the evidence was pretty compelling."

Hannibal presses his lips together with a hum of interest, but chooses not to ask any questions. Pushing his tray back from his chest, he observes the tension in Will's posture as he stands facing him, one hand twitching absently at his side while he sips his coffee.

"He knows you're living here?"

Will shakes his head,

"No…no, I've been careful. Even Molly doesn't…" he winces, "I have an attorney she sends stuff to in Virginia, and he forwards it on. The truck's still registered in Baltimore, and I pay my boss cash every month for this place, my name's not on the lease. There's no real way for him to track me, especially now he's out of the Bureau."

His gaze hold Hannibal's intensely, and although the older man doesn't feel any particular concern himself about the mysterious emailer, he can clearly see that Will has been affected by the moment of contact.

"Are you concerned that he may try and find you?"

"No. I think he finally believed me when I told him just how done I was this time. Throwing myself off a cliff maybe helped with that," he shrugs, "Maybe it's just guilt."

"He believes he permanently damaged you?"

Will's mouth twitches in a smile,

"Oh he knew that years ago. But I think maybe finding out about Molly and I might have poked something tender. I think he'd comforted himself with the idea that - broken as I was - at least I'd had something warm to go home to when he was done with me."

Something contracts sharply in Hannibal's chest, and surprised at his own reaction he stills himself as he is forced to recognise the unfamiliar emotion he feels at Will's choice of words.

Something warm.

He turns the phrase over in his mind, and feels the same bright prickle of irritation at the image it conjures up. A soft female body, lying under covers in a warm familiar bed, her curves welcoming the matching frame of her mate as he climbs in beside her. He swallows, and the taste of bile on the back of his tongue only echoes the bitterness he suddenly feels.

Will is quiet for much of the rest of the day, and although the weather is clear and warm, he doesn't suggest they take the chair out at four as they usually do. Instead, he only puts his head around the door and tells him that he's taking the dogs out alone.

"You should probably rest after yesterday. Build your strength back up."

He turns to go and then seems to notice he is unusually silent and pauses,

"You ok? You seem…off."

And Hannibal feigns mild surprise over the top of his book, reassures him that he is just tired, and to please not concern himself.

The evening draws in, dinner is made and eaten, and still he sits with the small tight feeling in his chest that refuses to subside. It both puzzles and irritates him that he should feel this way about someone who - to the best of his knowledge - he has never met, or is ever likely to meet. Someone who, by Will's own admission, he left knowing it was the right decision for both of them, that he would never be happy with revealing who he truly was to.

Darkness falls and outside the open window Hannibal hears the faint sounds of music coming from down the street, soft pops and shouts of laughter, the kind of sounds that bring to his mind street-fairs thronging with people. Open fires and the smell of roasting chestnuts: memories he imagines must be fragments from his childhood in Eastern Europe.

Craning his neck forward, he's trying to see more when Will appears in his doorway.

"People gearing up for Mardi Gras already. There's a party down the block, some kids letting off fireworks," he frowns, "I can shut the window if it's bothering you?"

Hannibal glances over at him, and shakes his head. Already dressed for bed in a t-shirt and sleep pants, Will still looks tired but seems noticeably less anxious than earlier in the day. His eyes on Hannibal though are bright and alert, as if he'd heard his thoughts from the next room and come to investigate.

"I remembered a festival when I was a child," Hannibal gives him a faint smile, "Or at least I *believe* it was my memory, I cannot be entirely certain of course."

Will's eyes soften and he nods slowly,

"What did you remember?"

Hannibal sighs,

"People in the street, laughter, music. A community that I was a part of."

"Family?"

"Perhaps."

He closes his eyes and allows the image to drift again, untethered, and not snatch at it or try and capture it. The sounds outside of laughter and the crackle of a fire bring a sudden wave of new pictures, and finding himself smiling with delight he nods his head.

“They sold lanterns there. On the street. Pierced things made of black tin that showed the constellations when a candle was lit inside it. I desired one of my own very badly. The one that showed the *Trys Sesutės* - Orion’s Belt.”

He opens his eyes, feeling strangely moved by the simple recollection, and finds Will smiling softly at him.

“That’s a good memory,” he says, and then looks thoughtful.

Stepping over to the bed, he sits down next to him and the warm length of his thigh rests against Hannibal’s own as he brings his head alongside his, stares out into the darkness with him.

“Maybe you’ll only ever remember good things,” he says softly, and when he turns his head to look at him he is so close that Hannibal can feel the flutter of his warm unsteady breath against his chin.

The tightness in his chest forgotten, he breathes in the smell of woodsmoke and firecrackers from outside, and then underneath it the smell of Will himself, a scent that is evocative of this man who he finds he cares for so deeply it’s hard in that moment not to lean into it. Bury his face in his skin, and greedily inhale every molecule of him that he can.

Out Of Control

"I have to go back to work next week."

They're sat on a bench in the dog park watching Buster and Ellie play tug-o-war with a rope toy when Will tells him, and despite his light tone they both understand what the statement means for them. Hannibal's strength has been steadily improving over the last week, but while he is now able to move short distances in the chair using his own strength, the timing is still less than ideal. Although the IV and catheter are now gone, he's still unable to get himself out of bed easily or to the bathroom without Will's help, and the thought of his being left alone in such a state for eight hours a day is not particularly comforting to him.

"You'll have the dogs with you," Will says tightly when he shares his concern, and then turns away to look across the park. A few metres away from them, Winston sits watching with anxious eyes. For a moment there's tense silence between them, and then Will sighs.

"You know I don't have a choice. We need money to live on, and I'm not about to start in on my savings at this stage. If you had money we could use, you don't know how to access it now, and until Molly manages to sell the house…" he shakes his head, "And I have no control over any of that! This, I can control."

"This?"

Not wanting to react to the mention of Molly's name, Hannibal picks up Winston's ball and throws it for him. It doesn't go far, but it's an improvement on last week.

"I can make enough so we can live, keep us going until…" he frowns, "Until things improve. Or you're well enough so we can move on."

Hannibal's head snaps round in surprise. It's the first time Will has made any mention to him of a plan to move elsewhere, or that anything at all was dependent on his state of health. Watching him closely, he waits until Winston drops the ball back between his feet and then picks it up a second time.

"Where would we go? If we went?"

Will grunts, and his head drops down between his shoulders before he looks at him with an expression of wry exasperation.

"I was kind of hoping you'd be the one to tell *me* that…eventually."

He spreads the fingers of his right hand out in front of him,

"If I had to make the decision myself though, I imagine it'd be somewhere warm. And far away. Somewhere we can lie in the sun all day, and not think about whether or not Jack Crawford is running my name for traffic tickets, or requesting recent credit card history."

“Cuba has a bilateral extradition treaty with the US. Although it has never to my knowledge been enforced. It would be the most obvious choice.”

Distracted by Will’s fantasy, Hannibal has answered him without thinking and, surprised, the younger man looks at him sideways with curious amusement.

“'*To your knowledge*’? Is this a fact you just accessed randomly, or is there more information attached to it?”

“Perhaps.”

Hannibal frowns lightly. Winston has dropped the ball again, and palming it softly he draws back his wrist.

“We had planned to run away together once before.”

From the corner of his eye he sees Will’s lips part fractionally, and when he throws the ball this time it arcs high across the grass in front of them, sending Winston into a delighted sprint.

“Do you remember something about that?”

Hannibal tries not to listen to his voice, or concentrate too hard. Picking up Winston’s dropped ball, he draws back his arm again and thinks only of the muscle flexing, the satisfying little build of heat in it as it springs forward and releases.

“A house near Cienfuegos. Overlooking the sea. With a red tile roof. The dining room opens onto a terrace, and sometimes there are white egrets in the summer.”

Beside him, Will lets out a small laugh of disbelief,

“Of course there are,” he shakes his head, “Anything else?”

The ball drops in front of them for a fourth time, and scooping it up Hannibal prepares to throw it again, fascinated by the sudden internal flood of information. To his disappointment though, as the ball sails out and upwards nothing else appears. He watches as it bounces off the turf only ten metres or so away, and then instead of Winston, Buster makes a dive for it.

Will is silent for a while, and then reaching out he touches gentle fingertips to the right side of his head. Traces the long line of the scar there from front to back.

“You told me that you’d made a place for us. Together. I always wondered what it looked like.”

Closing his eyes, Hannibal leans into the touch.

“I only wish I could tell you more.”

“I don’t know…”

There's a smile in his voice now, but he doesn't open his eyes again to see it,

"Red tile roof. Sun. Sea. Egrets. It's not the *worst* description."

Hannibal breathes a laugh,

"Perhaps if I had given you more of these details the first time, you would have made a different decision."

And just like that the hand is gone. Withdrawn with a suddenness that feels like the sun disappearing behind clouds.

The sun does not return for the rest of the afternoon, and although he is just as considerate as always in his handling of him, Hannibal feels Will's distance even as his hands hold and steady his body. Even as he wraps both arms around him to help him move from his chair into the shower stall.

"Temperature ok?" he asks, and his voice is careful, modulated, "Just give me a shout when you're done."

Later as he helps him to dress in the same fashion, Hannibal finds the corresponding tension in his body becoming almost unbearable, and as Will drops to his haunches to help him with his socks, he lifts a hand and touches it softly to his cheek. To his surprise, the younger man immediately raises his own to cover it. Sighs softly.

"I'm sorry. I don't mean to be like this."

Lifting his head, he looks up at him from the floor, and suddenly his eyes are shining with all the intensity they've been lacking all day. Pressing his face into Hannibal's palm, he lets his weight drop forward against him.

"You don't remember what happened before you gave me this scar, and I'm glad of that. I made a mistake and we both paid for it. We *all* paid and I could never take it back. I just…I didn't know what I wanted…"

He pauses, frowns,

"Actually no, that's not true. I did know. I just wouldn't let myself believe it was something I deserved, or could ever have."

He presses in towards him then, and wordlessly Hannibal parts his knees, allows him closer.

Will's fingers spread wide around his thighs, fingertips gentle against the muscle and - breath stalling in his throat - Hannibal cups his face, the angle of his jaw, filled with a kind of wondering disbelief as Will leans in and kisses him. Just a soft press of his lips, first to one side of his mouth, then his lower lip, the hollow underneath, then the other side.

Underneath his own shaking, he can also feel Will himself trembling through the palms of his hands - his breathing shallow and uneven - and a small sound escapes his throat, something he couldn't have controlled even if he'd tried. Hearing it, Will leans back from him and breathes in deeply, and the hands resting on his legs flex open.

"This isn't something I'd planned on happening," he says quietly, and his eyes are still closed, "It just happened. One day I looked at you, and it was just *there*. Like one of those pictures you can't see is really a rabbit, until someone points out the ears."

He smiles, and Hannibal aches.

"But you see the ears now?"

A laugh,

"The ears, the tail," he opens his eyes, "Kind of hard to imagine now how I ever thought it was anything else."

He leans in again, and the kiss he gives him is so heartbreakingly sweet, so poured full of everything he feels that it's all Hannibal can do to hold himself in check and remember to breathe.

Forgotten

Chapter Summary

This chapter dedicated to @YouDroppedYourForgiveness, for just being awesome.

When Hannibal awakes the next morning, it's to a room full of sunlight.

For a while he just lies still on his back, watching the changing colours on the ceiling as the breeze moves his curtains, and wonders why it is that today feels different. Flexing the muscles in his arms and legs under the covers, he draws his feet up, pushing his hands back against the headboard, and is pleased to note the slow improvement. His core muscles, devastated as they had been by the bullet and infection, are taking longer to recover though, and pressing a hand flat on his stomach he looks down at them critically. There's a memory lurking just below the surface that tells him that - where there is now softness - there was once a plane of taut, well-conditioned sinew, and he can't help but feel a somewhat narcissistic urge to reclaim it.

He's still rubbing his lower abdomen thoughtfully when Will appears in the doorway with his tray. Lifting an eyebrow, the younger man makes as if to take a step backwards over the threshold.

"I can give you a few more minutes if you'd like? If you need some privacy."

There's a new sparkle in his eyes that wasn't there the day before, and with a sudden jolt of realisation Hannibal remembers what it is that makes the dawning of this day so different from yesterday or the day before.

Last night, Will had kissed him.

Unable to prevent it, his cheeks flush with heat at the memory, and in the same instant he sees that Will is similarly affected. Ducking his head, he steps over to his bedside and sets the tray down in its customary place, before pausing.

"OK if I sit?"

Hannibal frowns lightly. Will's sudden uncertainty with their routine is curious, but unwilling to jump to any conclusions he only nods and reaches sideways for the bowl of oatmeal. He's just transferring the first spoonful to his mouth, when the other man speaks.

"I hope I didn't...uh...upset you last night."

Glancing at him, Hannibal's brow creases even deeper at the unfamiliar expression on his face and inclining his head, he sets down his spoon to look at him.

“I won’t pretend that I wasn’t surprised by your words. But I would hope it was clear to you how I received them?”

Will’s pupils darken fractionally, and he chews on his lower lip. As he’d sat knelt between his thighs against the bed, how Hannibal had ‘received his words’ had been all too evident, and in the end it had only been their mutual uncertainty about what should follow that meant he had left soon afterwards. And, judging by the look on his face now, Will is no less uncertain this morning.

“It was clear. Yes,” he says, and there’s an unmistakable heat behind his gaze, despite the reserve there.

“So your concern is purely for my physiological well-being?” he quirks an eyebrow, “I have to say, the possibility of my suffering a cardiac event from a mere kiss had never occurred to me before last night.”

And Will’s shakes his head, tries not to flush darker than he already has.

“Don’t joke, ok? That’s not as funny as you seem to think it is.”

His eyes skitter up from the floor to lock with Hannibal’s own,

“I sat in that room with those monitors for four months, remember? Sometimes I’d wake up at night imagining that sound…”

The older man pauses, understanding and suddenly regretful.

“A flatline, you mean?”

And Will’s expression clouds as he nods. The weight of the memory seems to settle heavily over his features and, keen to see it gone, Hannibal sets aside his bowl and reaches for his hand.

“Without wishing to quote you back to yourself Will: *I’m not going anywhere*. Thanks to your care, my strength improves every day, as does my co-ordination,” he gives him a faint smile, “In fact, if it were not for the stubborn refusal of my synapses to co-operate, I would describe myself as being in near excellent health.”

His fingers around Will’s hand gentle, the thumb tracing the back of his knuckles, and looking down at them he frowns thoughtfully.

“However, if your belief is that I should not excite myself unduly at present, perhaps it *would* be best if we kept the physical contact between us purely platonic for now.”

It’s a risky manoeuvre he knows, and one that could so easily backfire given Will’s very real concerns about the speed of his recovery, so he can’t help but feel a surge of satisfaction when he sees the payoff. Will’s brow furrows deeply, and his mouth opens to offer a sharp reply, before the words stall on his lips and his eyebrows draw together in consternation.

“You’re saying...maybe it'd be *better* this stays purely platonic?”

Hannibal blinks at him, his face studiously blank, and reaching for the cup of tea Will has brought him he blows over the surface before he drinks.

"I only defer to your better judgement," he says, mildly.

Will is both irritated and amused by his rather transparent attempt at reverse psychology, he can tell, and for the rest of the day they seem to circle each other with barely concealed anticipation, each trying to figure out what the other might be thinking. So at four, when Will suggests they take their customary walk, a little further than usual to the farmer's market on Claibourne Avenue, Hannibal agrees with relish. Recently, he has started to assist Will in the kitchen while he prepares dinner, and the thought of their sourcing fresh local ingredients for tonight's meal is both appealing and strangely energising.

Sat in his chair, surrounded on all sides by fragrant vegetables, herbs and produce, Hannibal feels a vibrancy seize his senses that is both hauntingly familiar and hugely pleasurable. He only realises how widely he is smiling, when he sees Will looking at him in open fascination.

"What are you remembering?" he says, and Hannibal only smiles wider.

"Only how much I enjoy this," he says.

Later, they stand side by side in the kitchen - the older man able to stay upright and stable now for longer periods of time - and after only a moment or two of watching Will chop roughly through the celeriac they bought to make soup, Hannibal reaches out a hand for the knife.

"May I?" he says, and Will's pupils widen at his tone.

Wiping one hand on the cloth tucked into his waistband, the younger man holds Hannibal's look for a moment before he very deliberately turns the blade and places it into his palm, handle first.

"Go ahead," he says quietly.

The delightfully familiar feel of the thing in his hand is almost like that of a beloved childhood toy, and sliding the rest of the celeriac towards him across the counter, he hesitates for a split second before he begin to cut. The slices are slow at first, although perfectly even, but after he finishes the one half he begins the second with a burst of dazzling speed.

It's wonderfully exhilarating to watch the bright keen edge as it passes down and through, over and over again with perfect precision, and it's only after Hannibal has minced all four bulbs into a delicate foaming chiffonade that he even pauses for breath, a light sweat shining at the base of his throat.

He looks at Will, and the dark intensity of the other man's gaze sends heat pulsing thickly through him. Will moves towards him then, so quick and soundless that he thinks he surprises

even himself, and suddenly the hand holding the knife is deftly bent around and the blade reversed, the tip ghosting against the flesh of his throat.

Will's lips hover millimetres from his own, parting with a soft breath into his mouth.

"*Purely platonic*?" he says "You really expect me to buy that?"

"You seemed certain that too much excitement might affect my recovery,"

Hannibal swallows, and the cool keen edge of the blade scrapes against his Adam's apple as it passes underneath it,

"I respect your opinion, Will."

"No. No, I think you just wanted to see what I would do,"

Will's eyes narrow, and there's just the tiniest, tightest shake of his head,

"You baited a hook and cast out a line. But you were clumsy, Hannibal. *Really* clumsy."

The knife hits the counter with a clatter, and stepping in against him Will smears his mouth into his with an urgency that sends every nerve ending in his body firing into life.

"Luckily for you I'm a hell of an easy catch," he says.

Home

Chapter Summary

> This chapter is dedicated to @lilylubanshee, because making new friends through fic is one of my favourite things.

When they finally break for air, they're both shaking. Will's hands are gripping the muscle of Hannibal's upper arms with an almost bruising fierceness, the edges of his blunt nails digging into the flesh. It takes him a second to realise that his are equally as possessively wrapped in the fabric of Will's shirt, and when he does he instinctively pulls him closer. The little noise the other man makes sparks a memory so vivid it hits him like a freight train.

Wind buffeting their cold bodies, heavy sky and clothes stiff and sticky with blood. Will's body pressed against him, their breath mingling in a cloud in the freezing air, as he crowds in against him, eyes filled with love and wonder.

It's like a mirror of his other vision, only this one is reversed. Instead of desperate anguish and fury, his heart is filled with joy, an expansive sense of peace. Instead of Will bleeding out at his hand, they have been bathed and brought together in another's blood.

His eyes spring wide and Will is looking into them,

"You remembered," he says, and his voice cracks over the words.

"Yes. I remember. We killed together, as one."

Hannibal's breath leaves him a long outward stream, and unable to bear the intense fire of Will's gaze any longer he looks down. There is very little space now between their bodies, but what there is still feels too great. Will's fingers flex against him, as if he's struggling to control himself.

"I feel like I need to be so careful with you, so *steady*," and when Hannibal looks up at him again he shakes his head, clenches his jaw, "And I'm tired of careful. I don't want to be careful around you any more."

"You still believe you might break me?"

And the younger man grits his teeth, pushes in against him,

"I never believed you *could* be hurt. Maybe I thought you were immortal. The devil. Smoke. And then I watched your body waste away in that bed, and I knew that you could be broken," his breath stutters, over the words, "That…I had broken you…"

"*Will*."

Unable to listen any longer, Hannibal silences him with a firm hand at his jaw,

"I'm not broken. I am whole and - as I've already assured you - perfectly healthy, aside from some back pain and a need to sit down in the not too distant future. You have no need to be as careful with me as you imagine."

He leans in and - uncertain if he is even prepared for what may come next - softly captures Will's mouth in a kiss that is anything but uncertain. Under the spread of his hand at his waist, he feels the younger man's muscles contract as he draws in a deep inward breath and then respond with a soft sound that seems to come from somewhere deep inside him: a heady mixture of need, desire and desperate relief. Firmly then, he pushes Hannibal back against the edge of the counter and deepens the kiss, until he is breathless and shaking from holding himself upright.

Will's lips break from his with a soft gasp, only now he's grinning,

"Need to sit down yet?"

And Hannibal nods, even as he tries to recapture that devilish, smart mouth.

Dinner preparations forgotten, they move and press and stumble their way back through the kitchen door and into Will's room. It's a practical choice being the closer of the two, but as the other man steps back from him to pull his t-shirt over his head and throw it to the floor, Hannibal can't help but feel it's a conscious one too.

His room is where Will has looked after him, is gentle and careful with him, brings him his meals. Will's own room is someplace else. Somewhere he retreats to when the reality of a weakened and wholly changed Hannibal Lecter becomes too much for him. And Hannibal doesn't want to be that version of himself tonight. He wants to be whoever felt that way on the bluff, whoever inspired this breath-taking young man to kill with him, for him.

Will eyes him, pupils dark and lips parted, and taking his cue the older man reaches down and pulls his own shirt over his head and steps towards the bed. He sits on the edge of the mattress, and waits as Will watches him from beneath heavy-lidded eyes.

"I'm not even really sure what it is I want from you," he says, and then laughs, a little self-conscious.

"What *might* you want?" Hannibal asks, and the other man purses his lips softly, thoughtfully.

Stepping closer, he occupies the space between Hannibal's knees - nudging them a little further apart with his own - then lifts his hands and pushes them into his hair. Not pulling, but

hard enough to tilt his head back.

"When I came to you at the house, after Bedelia had left, the way you looked at me…it was like you'd thrown yourself wide open. And all I had to do was step inside," he sighs, "It scared me. And I scared myself more when I realised how much I wanted it. That first night I didn't want to be away from you. I came into your bed and lay next to you, and it was everything I could do not to…"

He shakes his head, frowns deeply,

"I don't know what I wanted. I wanted what we'd had before, what I'd felt in that moment with you. Like we'd absorbed each other somehow, and become…something else. I lay next to you in the dark and just *wanted*...and none of it made any sense to me."

Lifting his hand, Hannibal lays it to the small of Will's back, and presses him inwards. The soft curve of the other man's belly brushes against his lips, and parting them he kisses his skin, bends his head to the scar that he made.

"Maybe this makes a different kind of sense to the kind you're used to."

Will makes a small sound of pleasure at the touch of his tongue, and the hand in Hannibal's hair gentles, strokes down to cup the base of his skull.

"And what kind would that be?"

In answer, he pushes in hard with his hand and the younger man's body flexes, falling forward against him in a controlled fashion until his knees rest on the bed either side of his hips.

"The kind that feels good."

Will laughs and his breath warms Hannibal's face, even as he leans in again, licking into his mouth with a soft slow tongue.

They sit cradled in each other for a long time, Will's hands on his body seeming to test every muscle in turn, stretching and flexing against him as if reassuring himself that he is real and solid, unlikely to break. It's incredibly arousing for him to have this beautiful creature sat straddling his lap, even still clothed as he is from the waist down, and yet despite that Hannibal feels no sense of urgency overtaking him. Will's kisses change from minute to minute, from deeply intense to light and considering, and after almost an hour or so has passed this way, Hannibal places a hand on his chest and stills him. And as if realising what he's being silently asked, Will covers it with his own and looks down at him.

"I don't want to fuck. Is that ok?"

Hannibal's eyes close for a moment and he parts his lips, showing his teeth a little as he tries not to smile.

“Will. I promise you, I made no such presumption.”

“I’m sure.”

Will’s voice is wry, like he’s not sure he isn’t being laughed at. Leaning in he presses a kiss to Hannibal’s temple, first on one side and then the next.

“I want this though. Tonight. I want you close.”

He hesitates, not sure whether he’s been understood, and his eyelashes lower,

“I’d like you here when I wake up.”

They continue to kiss as they strip down to their underwear: softly, almost distractedly as if they need to remind themselves constantly what this new thing feels like. Will’s hand is firm at his hip as pulls him in behind him, making a small grunt of contentment as the other man draws his knees up under his own, spooning him close. They lie in silence for a while, listening to the sounds from the street outside, and - almost reverently - Hannibal presses his lips to Will’s shoulder again, the side of his neck, his nape, before resting his forehead there in quiet wonderment.

“What are you thinking?” Will says, and his voice vibrates through Hannibal’s palm, against his chest and - shifting - he tucks him a little closer.

“That this is what I imagine home feels like,” he says.

Witness

Hannibal dreams of a house deep in the woods. A small stone cottage with a turf roof that is bowed down with age, and a chimney that curls blue smoke up into the tree-damp air. The sky is a soft grey and the floor of the forest underneath his feet is spongey with a million dead leaf skeletons, rustling with a wet schirring sound as his feet move through them. In the dream he is a man, seeing through the eyes of a boy.

The door of the cottage is broken, hanging like a tooth in an open mouth and as he moves inside - unable to stop himself, unable to look away - he sees them. First his father, shirt torn and hand outstretched toward the fireplace like an accusing puppet, and then his mother. Slumped backwards over the chair, her pale hands are clutched to the dark fabric of her breast, while - most shockingly - her bare legs are exposed and folded beneath her, stockings ripped and ruined at her ankles. He steps towards her and knows already that she is dead, or about to die. The dark pool around her, that he'd first thought of as her skirts, reflects the light of the fire, and then - as he watches - porcelain fingers tremble and then trail into wetness.

He hears his sister's voice high and sharp from outside, like a rabbit in a snare, and with a start he awakes.

It takes him a moment to understand where he is, and when he does his chest contracts and slowly he fills his lungs with a deep sense of relief. Will's body is curled backwards against him - much as it had been when they both finally fell asleep - and his right arm is laid heavy and warm over his own, their fingers laced lazily through one another against his belly. The curve of his lower back presses softly against Hannibal's abdomen, and despite not wanting to wake him, he cannot resist moving in closer, forming a tighter C around him. And Will stirs, moves, stretches back against him, makes a soft little sound of surprised contentment, and he decides that his waking isn't such a bad thing after all.

Turning his head sideways, the younger man looks back at him over his shoulder and gives him a smile that is both all-knowing and still half-asleep.

"Never would have had you down as a snuggler."

Hannibal hums, and curling his arm tighter around Will's middle, he draws his knees in, presses his lips between his shoulder blades. The skin there is warm and brown and tastes of salt, and he contents himself for a minute or two merely tasting it, his tongue moving softly against the ridges of his spine. Will's stomach muscles contract and bunch beneath the palm of his hand, and after a while he rolls his head backwards against him with a sigh.

It's only then that he realises how low their joined hands have moved on his belly. Will is hot and half-hard under the cotton fabric of his underwear, and when Hannibal stills his movement he arches unconsciously toward his touch again, turning his head sideways so his neck stretches out, exposed. And really, he isn't sure what makes him do it - whether it's

some instinct bubbling to the surface or just the spike in his arousal he feels at the sight - but without thinking Hannibal bares his teeth, and bites down.

Will's reaction is instantaneous, and extreme.

Throwing himself over and back to straddle Hannibal's body, he pins his forearms to the bed with his knees and clamps both his hands around his throat with the cool swift precision of a striking snake. They stare at each other, breathless and open mouthed for a long moment, before finally Will speaks.

"I maybe should have mentioned it before, but I don't react well to teeth."

His hands around Hannibal's throat flex and squeeze, the fingers meshing, before he slowly eases off. Sitting back, he adjusts his weight so it's resting on the span of the other man's pelvis rather than forward onto his knees, and allows him to move his arms out from underneath. He flushes, and the expression on his faces moves from sharp and cautioning to self-conscious.

"If you could… just try and remember that," he sighs, "And I'll try to remember not to snap and choke you out next time you try to give me a love bite."

He rests a hand flat on Hannibal's chest. The racing heartbeat contained beneath it feels as if it should be visible to the naked eye, and he watches as Will takes note of it, inclines his head as if he's listening and waits for it to slow again.

"Guess I didn't break you just yet," he says softly.

They dress in their separate bedrooms, partly out of necessity - all Hannibal's clothes are in his - and partly because of what has passed between them. Although he understands, on a very basic level, the foundation their old relationship had been based on, Hannibal cannot help but feel uncertain about what that means for it now. The fact that he cannot remember their combined history leaves him feeling disadvantaged and wrong-footed when it comes to reading Will, and he suspects that - if he is to avoid further missteps such as the one he made that morning - it would be helpful if he could fill in at least some of those blanks.

He's still considering how best to accomplish that when Will appears in his doorway, his eyes a little more guarded than usual.

"We're out of milk. You ok if I run down to the store?"

He's been gone almost two hours before Hannibal realises that something is wrong. Will's cell vibrates in the kitchen when he eventually thinks to call it, and limping slowly to the corner of the street he realises he has no idea which store he went to. The bodega is three blocks away, the nearest 7-11 maybe five in the opposite direction, and either one is equally as impossible for him to reach on foot or in his chair. It takes him another thirty minutes of

anxious fidgeting and staring through the window up the sidewalk, before he scratches up Will's truck keys from the kitchen counter and goes out in search of him.

He drives to the bodega first, circles the block looking through the windows, his feet jerking and stiff at the pedals, before turning and going back in the other direction. A half block from the 7-11 he sees the lights and slows to a crawl, pulling into the curb behind a station wagon. The parking lot is full of people - two police cars and an ambulance - and when he cranes his head forward, his heart lurches in his chest at the unmistakable smear of red painting the doors. The spiderweb hole in the glass.

Stepping out of the truck, he pulls the hood of his sweats up and over his head, rounds his shoulders down and limps his way towards it. He gets close enough to listen and tries his best to look like a casual gawker, lifting his head to peer through the crowd even as he's straining to hear the voices of the cops.

"Other guy took him out as soon as he went for his belt. Kid wasn't even packing, probably just looking to get some cash to score."

"He gonna make it?"

"Could be. Girl here was a nurse looked after him pretty good, till paramedics got here. He might be lucky."

"Shooter in cuffs?"

"Uh huh. Turns out he was wanted for something else. Brody took him down to the precinct."

The house feels horrifyingly empty when Hannibal returns to it. Exhausted and unsure what to do next, he drops the keys back on the counter and limps slowly into Will's room and sits down on the bed. After a moment or two Winston pads in to join him, and together they sit together in silent communion, until fatigue sends him onto his side, his eyes closing in a desperate bid to order his thoughts.

He lies for maybe an hour that way, before Winston's sharp bark and the sound of the front door opening and closing rouse him.

"Hannibal!!"

Will's voice has the sharpness of panic to it, and his footsteps stumble as he makes his way from the kitchen, to the guest room, before finally into his own room. Seeing him lying stretched out on the bed, he lets out a long shuddering breath of relief.

"There was a…" he opens his mouth, shaking his head, "A guy got shot at the 7-11. This girl, just a kid really, she helped out and…she was…I had to go downtown with her and make a statement."

He frowns, hands spread out in front of him now, and his expression is both upset and resentful,

“I called but you didn’t pick up. I was worried you’d go looking for me.”

Hannibal rolls onto his back and closes his eyes, and again it feels as if the pulse of his heart should be something visible from the outside. As if there should be some sign, some way of Will knowing how he feels without him saying a word. Without something as obvious as tears.

“Hey…”

The hand at his temple is as soft as a sigh, fingers trailing through wetness, before reaching back to press through his hair, stroke his brow. Opening his eyes he looks up into Will’s face and sees layer upon layer of emotion, wonder and sadness, confusion and hope. Love.

“What were you thinking?” he says, “When I didn’t come home."

“About family,” Hannibal replies.

Small Things

Chapter Summary

**We've reached the halfway point, so here's where we switch POV. Because successful interfusion requires two balanced elements.*

There are precious few smells that evoke positive childhood memories for Will Graham, but if he were pressed on the subject he'd probably say something flip like 'the smell of my dad burning the corned beef hash', despite the fact that his dad - having been in the navy - was actually a pretty passable cook and took some pride in the fact.

Stuff that other people (*girlfriends*) would mention - the smell of their grandma's cookies, birthday candles, cotton candy - none of that data had been stored away in his own head. Skinny latchkey kid Will Graham didn't have a grandma, or birthday parties, and on the rare occasions they happened upon a carnival there was no spare money for extras like cotton candy or hotdogs.

He remembers the smell of beer on his dad's breath. The damp fug of bedsheets drying in front of a space heater. His wet sneakers when the soles wore through and let in the rain.

He does not remember pancakes.

The sounds as he cracks open his eyes though, are not so unfamiliar as the smell. The scrape of a pan being moved from the heat, china clinking, and in the background the faintest strains of something that very nearly stills his heart. Classical music. Something baroque and emotional with a string section, music that he knows is found a long way up the dial from where he usually has the radio tuned.

Swinging his feet out of the bed to the floor, he looks across at the space on the far side of the mattress. A shallow imprint in the pillow is all that remains to tell him that he hadn't spent the night alone, but warmed by the presence of Hannibal's body, albeit distanced a little by self-consciousness after the emotion of last night. Padding in his bare feet through to the bathroom, Will looks into the mirror and pees, and rubs a hand through his bed-messed hair with a mixture of trepidation and light-headed almost-happiness.

Because Hannibal is up before him.

And Hannibal is in the kitchen listening to Bach and making breakfast.

Pulling a t-shirt on, he pauses to scratch Winston's ears and make a fuss of Buster in the hallway before he steps unhurriedly through to the next room, coming to rest against the doorframe with an expression of bemusement on his face. Dressed a little less casually than usual - if cargo pants and one of his own henleys can be called less casual - Hannibal's hair still looks damp from the shower he's somehow managed without his help. Smiling to himself, Will can't help but notice his beard has also been carefully trimmed and shaped, creating a look that's a little less 'homeless vet' and a touch more 'successful academic' than its been up until now.

"You've been busy," he says quietly.

The other man's eyes dart a little self-consciously to his face, as he moves from the sink to the stove. There is a faint sheen of sweat on his forehead along the hairline, at his collar bone, but other than that he looks perfectly composed, perfectly calm. Perfectly...Hannibal.

"I awoke early, and felt the pressing urge to make breakfast for us both."

His lips curve upwards in a smile that is almost shy, and expertly he shimmies the pan backwards on the heat, flips off the burner.

"I'd hoped to bring it to you while you were still in bed, but here you are."

And Will shakes his head, confused, amused.

"But here I am," he says.

He clears the small kitchen dining table off, and together they sit down at it to eat their meal. Giving a soft laugh when he sees it, Will points his finger towards the syrup Hannibal has somewhat fussily decanted into a glass jug, and then watches surprised as the older man reaches over him with it to lace his plate.

"Ok. *Stop*. What is this?"

Hannibal's eyes are warm and guileless,

"My apologies, Will. I thought you were reaching for the syrup."

"I'm not talking about the syrup, Hannibal. What's going on with you?"

The other man's chin lifts a fraction, his lips pursing at his sharper tone, and the small movement jolts Will in his seat.

The subtle tiny things that make up Hannibal Lecter - the mannerisms he's been lacking ever since he came home from the hospital - are as familiar to him as the creases in his own palm, and to see one appear so unexpectedly steals the breath from his lungs. Putting down his fork, he hesitates before he reaches over the table to cover his hand, because for some reason he suddenly feels that he needs to remind himself who they are to each other.

Hannibal looks at it and frowns, before turning his own hand over and circling Will's wrist gently.

"I must confess, I am feeling far more…*myself* today than ever before. When I awoke beside you this morning, I knew who I was, how we came to be here and everything that has occurred in the last few months. Even for some time before."

Raising his eyes, he meets Will's anxious stare with a steadiness that feels both at once reassuring and a little unsettling.

"I remember the house near the shore. I remember how we spent our first night there: bruised and broken, and yet triumphant," he sighs, "And I remember Bedelia's arrival the next day, and your departure. And the period after that, before your return."

Will's breath leaves him in a thin ragged exhale. Hannibal's expression is intense but deeply fond, a strange fusion of what he thinks as the 'Hannibal-before' and the 'Hannibal-since' the fall, and the combination is both confusing and intoxicating. The hand holding his own strokes down his wrist, over his ulna, traces the forearm, before his eyes drop back down to his plate.

"We should eat before it gets cold," he says.

After breakfast they wash the dishes together in companionable silence, the radio still tuned to the classical station throughout and their hips brushing occasionally. It's such a banal but pleasant way to spend time that it takes Will until they're done and Hannibal is noticeably fatigued from the long period on his feet, to remember that he has something he badly needs to discuss with him.

Walking with him to the sitting room, offering subtle support to his weaker right side, Will waits until he's sitting comfortably with his lower back supported before he drops into the chair opposite.

"It's really good to see you moving about so well," he says, and even as the words leave his mouth he sees Hannibal react, instinctively knowing something is up.

"And don't be mad…" he starts, and almost immediately regrets it.

"Will. What have you done?"

The flatness of his tone has a note of warning in it, but beneath that he can hear something else more subtle. Something that the old Hannibal Lecter would never have betrayed.

"Nothing that changes things, I promise. But after what happened yesterday, I realised that it's just a matter of time until someone finds me here. We need to have a plan of where we go next. And for that we need you strong again."

Hannibal's expression shifts thoughtfully, but there's a fragment of hurt pride there that doesn't get hidden quite quickly enough.

"I believe that I'm making fair progress, although admittedly my core muscles have been severely affected by the long period of inactivity, as have the major muscles of my…"

“You need help with your physio Hannibal, and I don’t have a clue what I’m doing.”

Fixing his eyes on the other man face, Will sucks in a breath and holds it for an instant,

“So I asked someone for help.”

The words are still hanging in the air between them like a curse when there’s a soft sound of a knock on the front door, and all four dogs start up barking. Dropping his head low between his shoulders, Will breathes a sigh at the unfortunate timing. That Hannibal is feeling more himself today - and therefore is more objectionable - is unfortunate enough, but to have had so little time to lay the groundwork before the arrival of their guest is frustrating. Risking being shot down in flames at such a hasty decision though, he decides to go for broke.

“Her name is Zola. I met her yesterday, when the guy got shot. She’s Russian - a qualified nurse and a physio - but no green card, no work visa. So right now she’s living in her cousin Nikolai’s basement, washing dishes for a few dollars an hour.”

Hannibal’s eyes on his are dark and steady, and he still can’t make out if he’s angry with him or just considering what he’s saying. Hoping it’s the latter, he leans forward,

“I’ve met kids like her here before. She’s smart and tough and she'll do her job, take the money and won’t ask any questions. I told her you were a wounded vet, that you don’t like to talk much,” he spreads his fingers, “Just…meet her. If you think it’s too much of risk, we can just send her home.”

The silence stretches out between them, and watching the other man’s face Will waits for a sign that he hasn’t massively overstepped. For Hannibal to have allowed him to witness him in such a weakened state is one thing, but to allow a stranger into the intimate space they have shared in such harmony he fully understands is quite an ask.

“The old Hannibal would say no of course.”

He says the thought out loud before realising he’s even spoken, but to his surprise - instead of being affronted - the other man lifts his chin, and after a moment slowly nods his agreement.

“Perhaps he did not trust anyone but himself to keep him safe.”

And the look that passes between them is as intimate and tender as any physical touch they’ve shared.

“Go and let her in,” he says.

Early Morning

Will hasn't missed work exactly, but the feeling of doing something with his hands that's useful and relatively mentally undemanding is a oddly welcome relief. And much as he enjoys Hannibal's company, he tells himself there's something relaxing about being back in the engine shop, with just his taciturn boss Patrick for company and with no need to say a word all day if he doesn't feel like it. And although he would never say it, Patrick is pleased to have him back, if only because it means he can finally move himself back out front to the dock again, under the boats where he generally prefers to be.

"You gonna be here all week?" he says, barely moving his eyes from the floor as he shrugs on his coat, "Everything ok at home now?"

Will nods, and then smiles as without waiting for anything further Patrick immediately turns to go. Watching him stomp out into the rain, he turns back to lean against his workbench and calmly contemplate the seized outboard he's been left to deal with. Just like his own life right now, the engine is snarled up, messy, dysfunctional and completely stalled out, but as Will reaches out for a wrench and begins to work, he feels confident that this particular problem at least is one he is capable of fixing.

His first day back seems to pass a great deal slower than he's used to, despite having more than enough work to keep him occupied, and as the morning wears on he finds himself glancing at the clock more than is his usual habit. Patrick come back in at lunchtime and they observe their normal ritual of eating together, although neither man speaks much. Polite questions about their dogs, how his 'uncle' is doing, how Pat's wife is, all take only a few seconds and then the rest of their time together is spent mostly in silence. Listening to the gulls and passing the occasional comment on the sports section of The Times spread out in front of them.

By the time it gets to four-thirty, Will is finding himself almost agitated by the slowness of the clock's hands, and laying the shattered rotor blade he's working on to one side he hooks his coat off the peg and flips the motor shop's sign to 'closed' for the day. Pat is still out somewhere in the dockyard and will likely be there until it's dark, so there's no-one to say goodbye to as he jogs to his truck. He only realises he's driving over the speed limit when he takes a corner and the tyres skid out, but as he pulls up to the curb outside his house at four-fifty exactly, he is forced to admit something to himself that he would have never believed possible before today.

That he just hurried home from work because he misses a cannibalistic serial killer.

Resting his head on the steering wheel for a moment, Will exhales slowly as he listens to the engine cool. That he'd left it so long before leaving him alone had been an easy decision to explain away to himself. Hannibal had had a serious brain injury, was still weak and unable to move himself around easily, had no way to defend himself properly if someone came

knocking, but the actual truth was far simpler and more difficult to admit to himself. The fact was that, even after almost three whole weeks in virtual isolation with no-one else but him for company, he still preferred to be with Hannibal Lecter than anywhere else.

When he finally goes inside, he finds Hannibal Lecter stripped down to his underwear and laid out sweating on his bed.

"He works hard, and he has a strong will. Very strong. I think, with daily work like today? He's going to get better real fast."

Zola's face is serious and intense as she speaks to Will from her position at the older man's side, but then - as Hannibal had said himself after she'd left them the day before - Zola Manusharov appears to be a very serious and intense human being. Perspiring more than a little herself, the young nurse is dressed in sweats and a t-shirt and - judging by the redness of her palms - looks to have just finished some pretty serious and intense work on Hannibal's calf muscles.

"We started outside with the bars and he made good progress. His footwork is good, although his speed is still slow. His thighs muscles still need a lot of strengthening, maybe a stepper might help," she shrugs, "Or you can just work with him on his resistance?"

Will's lips twitch,

"Oh believe me, I've tried."

The joke misses Zola entirely, and instead she turns to demonstrate her point.

"Like this," she says, and taking Hannibal's bare foot in one hand she leans in and presses his leg back until it's bent in flat against his chest. The older man breathes out sharply with the effort involved, baring his sharpened canine teeth in a grin of satisfaction as Zola leans her whole weight into the movement, and watching them Will feels heat suddenly suffuse his cheeks.

"Isn't that too much?" he asks.

He hears how clipped and hard his words sound, but pushing in harder Zola only shakes her head.

"He can take it."

Hannibal's eyes move to fix on his, and his gaze seems curious and vaguely amused at what he sees there.

"Yes, Will," he says with a faint smile, "Don't worry. I can take it."

He comes later to bed that night than usual, maybe an hour after Will has turned out the light. Since they started sharing their sleeping quarters the previous week, it's started to become routine that they lie and talk for a while before they fall sleep, and he can't help but feel the change is a deliberate one. Hannibal's warmth seeps across the mattress towards him, but he does not move closer, does not initiate the same closeness he did before, despite it being their first day spent apart. Confused and still unsettled over his earlier feelings, Will closes his eyes and listens to the other man's breathing as it slows and regulates and then begins to lengthen.

When he wakes again, sunlight is just starting to bleed through the shutters with a cool grey light, and for a while he lies on his stomach just watching it move, his head now empty of thought. The room is dim and warm, and turning to one side he sees Hannibal has thrown the covers off in the night and rolled onto his back. The curve of his belly rises and falls softly as he sleeps, and reaching a hand out Will pauses momentarily before laying it down.

The reaction isn't immediate, but after a moment or two Hannibal stirs and opens his eyes to look at him.

"You used to do that in the hospital."

His voice is cracked and roughened by the sleep but Will hears the warmth in it, and smoothing down with his palm, he nods.

"I did. Feels like a long time ago now."

"It isn't."

Hannibal smiles softly, and at his sides his hands flatten out on the sheet.

"Do you miss it sometimes?"

Will's winces, and looking up at him he starts to shake his head,

"Thinking you might die in your sleep? No…how can you…"

"I meant…do you miss being able to touch me as and when you wanted. To do whatever you wished with me?"

Hannibal's lips purse softly, thoughtfully,

"Lay your hands on me. Read to me, wash me. As if my body were your own."

His eyes rest on him, golden even in the dim light, with that particular curiosity that he thinks of as being quintessentially Hannibal: questions in them that he already knows all the answers to. Swallowing the hard lump of emotion in his throat, Will moves his hand up along his chest and brushes sideways across his pectoral muscles. Hannibal's body is so familiar to his hands now, that he can feel every tiny change, every ridge of new muscle that has formed since he came home.

"When Zola was touching you before, I suddenly felt…I don't know…"

He frowns, trying to find the right word. His hand reaches Hannibal's belly again, and smoothing outwards in a circle he feels the other man shiver, the sinews in his abdomen contracting.

"Proprietary?"

Will nods because the word fits perfectly, and as if to underline the fact he flattens his palm and presses it down beneath the other man's waistband, watches as his pupils widen and darken and his breath catches. Hannibal's sex is warm and thick beneath his hand, and gripping it softly he leans in towards him until he can feel his breath against his lips.

"Like you were mine, and I didn't want anyone else touching you," he says.

Warning

For almost as long as he has known him, Will has had sexual dreams about Hannibal.

In the early days they were easy to explain to himself. Hannibal was the first man he'd even truly opened up to, the first man he trusted. Their relationship - back then at least - had felt nurturing and deeply reparative, so despite never having considered himself bisexual, he had been untroubled by the explicit imagery in the visions or even with the arousal he'd experienced when waking. Although not a psychotherapist, Will understood the term 'erotic transference' and everything that went with it. And after all, Hannibal's aesthetic attractiveness was hardly a fact in dispute.

Later on though, the dreams - although always beginning as intensely erotic - inevitably moved from the pleasurable to the horrific, and more than once he had woken in a cold sweat, clutching at his sheets, and with an erection that was almost painful in intensity. In the early months of living with Molly they had been a distressingly regular occurrence, so regular in fact that he'd had to concoct a story to explain them, as well as find a way of banishing the enduring images from his mind when she then moved to touch him. Sometimes it was easy, and he could simply open his eyes and see his wife in front of him. But occasionally, when she came to him in the dark, Hannibal's face would remain in his head like an after-image, filling him with guilt even as Molly's warm mouth engulfed him.

The reality though? The reality is so far removed from those dreams, so utterly the opposite of anything he has ever imagined, that he finds it hard to believe this is the same creature who has haunted them for so long.

Instead of goring and pinning him, submerging him in darkness, this Hannibal touches him with a gentle lingering sweetness, lips soft and warm against his own as he draws Will down towards him, presses a hand to the small of his back. His eyes, although still half-closed from sleep, lock with his own in an intense golden-brown gaze, as if searching for something he needs to find before this goes any further than it already has. And as an answer to his silent question, Will only tightens his hold around him.

Feeling Hannibal growing hard beneath his hand is nowhere near as strange as he'd imagined, and moving his mouth to his throat he presses a kiss to the side of it, the underside of his jaw where he can feel the pulse jumping erratically.

"I used to dream of this," he says, and the other man's breath leaves him a hurried little exhale as he struggles to maintain his control.

"I feel fairly confident in saying that I did too," he says a little unevenly, "Although sadly those particular memories have yet to return to me."

Will laughs, and Hannibal's cock pulses warmly beneath his hand in response.

“My dreams were never like this though. You were never…sweet to me,” he frowns, “They were always nightmares. Blood and bone and blackness. Sometimes we weren’t even human.”

Hannibal hums and shifts, and the sound vibrates against him as he draws him in closer, one arm circled loosely around his waist.

“Perhaps that was your way of distancing yourself from the act. Making yourself an animal absolves you of responsibility. Animals have no morals, no sense of right or wrong. In order to make Iove to me, you had to become something other than yourself.”

Pausing in his trail along his jawline, Will touches teeth to the other man’s lower lip and feels him still, the muscles in his abdomen tightening.

“Is *that* what this is?” he says quietly against his mouth.

There is no route plan in his mind for what he is doing, no understanding or real objective, but right now, in this bed with this man, that feels just fine. The body against him is hard and soft in all the right places, planes of muscle and peach-soft skin that - were he even to return to his right mind for a moment - would still feel intimately familiar to him. He has learned the map of Hannibal's body by heart, from the prickling salt-sweetness along his hairline to the soft concave dip of his hip bone, and there is no part of it now that is not beloved or beautiful to him.

“I love your body,” he says and the words are almost lost in the crease of his neck, the hollow of his clavicle, but he knows the other man hears them because his breath stalls in his lungs and his hips hitch upwards under his stroking hand.

Rolling his head to one side, Hannibal seeks his eyes out again, his pupils wide and luminous black,

“Did you always?” he says, and his lips part with his outward breath.

“No, not always.”

Will grunts, presses blunt teeth to his collarbone,

“I envied it though. The way you moved. You were graceful in a way I never could be, powerful,” he smiles, shakes his head, “An apex predator, to anyone with the sense to see it.”

“But you didn’t see it?”

“You hid it from me. You were good at hiding it.”

“And when you did?”

“When I did it was too late. You’d already sprung the trap. After that I hated you for a while. Hated myself too.”

The hand he has curled around Hannibal's cock tightens, and moulding his body to the other man's side, Will pushes his face into his skin.

"It wasn't a good time for either of us."

"And then?"

"And then I *really* saw you. Like you saw me. We saw each other."

In the semi-darkness, he sees Hannibal's brow crease in a frown, like he's trying hard to remember something that keeps slipping away, but after moment or two it passes.

"Before we fell, before…when you had your other life, your wife. Did you still see me then? In your dreams?"

"Yes. But in my dreams I was always the one being pursued, your victim. You would chase me and gut me…*fuck me*…And I'd wake up still wanting you to finish the job."

Hannibal's breath catches in his throat, and he rolls his hips helplessly against him as he replies.

"I'll confess…it doesn't sound…that appealing."

Will presses a kiss to his breastbone,

"Perhaps not. And now I come to think of it, I'm not sure that *this*…isn't exactly what you'd had in mind all along. You were always encouraging me to take control, right from the first. Tap into my power. Spill blood. Become."

The hot, tight slide of his hand around Hannibal's cock elicits another sound from the other man's throat and grinning wolfishly, Will leans in to curl his tongue against his nipple,

"Now I'm wondering if maybe all you ever *really* wanted was someone who could hold you down while you came apart."

Hannibal says his name then, urgently with a note of warning in it, and the single syllable is so heated with emotion that - hearing it - Will feels a spike of arousal that goes straight to his very core. That his own dick is straining against his underwear untouched seems an irrelevant detail though, as Hannibal - still saying his name - finally comes hot and messy all over his clenched fist.

Walk Away

They lie together entangled for far longer than Will knows is sensible, given that he has to work in a few hours and that showering would now seem to be a necessity. Rubbing his bearded face between Hannibal's shoulder blades, he laughs at the low growling sound he makes in response, and then reluctantly slides his arm from its place around his waist and begins to pull himself upright.

"You're getting up already?"

Hannibal's voice is almost peevish, and rolling onto his back he tugs at Will's forearm until he falls back across him. Once there, he wraps both arms around his torso and buries his face in his neck. The soft scrape of his beard is unbearably ticklish, and squirming away from him Will tries again to free himself.

"C'mon. I have to shower. There's no way I can go to work smelling like this."

He feels Hannibal's teeth press against his exposed throat as he grins in response.

"I think you smell wonderful."

"Of course you do."

Will pushes him, pressing his body away from his own until he can see his eyes, see his smirking mouth,

"I smell like you."

Hannibal's legs twist around his own, wrapping him in full-body embrace that feels far stronger than he would have thought possible a few days ago, and unable to break away he groans softly with defeat into his hair.

"Seriously. You need to let me shower. And Zola will be here again just after 8, so maybe you might want to think about washing too."

The other man grunts, presses a soft kiss to his sternum and then abruptly releases him.

"Then I have the perfect solution," he says.

If Will had considered it an almost overwhelmingly intimate act to jerk Hannibal off, then showering with him now seems almost impossibly so. It doesn't make any kind of sense of course. Holding someone's cock in your hand and watching their face as they come *should* be the most exposing thing he can imagine, but somehow being pressed belly-to-belly with Hannibal in a tiny shower, while the older man shampoos his hair and trails kisses along his shoulder, makes his knees feel weak. Perhaps it's the sheer domesticity of it that makes him

feel so vulnerable, but when Hannibal soaps his hand up for a second time and presses it to the scar on his abdomen, it's everything he can do to keep himself upright. Soft up until now, his dick gives an obvious twitch at his touch that he just knows Hannibal notices, and placing a firm hand over it, he leans his forehead against him.

"Much as I *love* the idea of reciprocation, we don't really have time for this right now."

Hannibal's lips curve upwards in a smile, and spreading his palm wide he makes a slow circle that feels nothing short of suggestive.

"Of course, Will. I was merely ensuring you'd been entirely thorough."

If work had been interminable the day before, today it feels like torture. After spending what feels like two or three hours disassembling a crank-shaft, Will stares up at the clock open mouthed when he sees that only forty-five minutes have elapsed. Patrick is in the office more than out of it today, and the constant sounds he makes - small coughs and clearings of his throat - irritate him more and more as the morning goes on. At midday he has to take a walk around the block just to cool down.

Buying a sandwich from the place on the corner, he hesitates for a moment or two with his cell in his hand before dialling the house. The phone rings four or five times before Hannibal picks up, and then there's silence for a moment, into which he simply breathes.

"Is anything wrong Will?"

The note of amusement in his voice is unmistakable, and of course Hannibal recognises his breathing, of course.

"No, everything's fine. How's…uh…how's the physio going?"

Tearing at the sandwich with his teeth, he listens with a growing sense of frustration as Hannibal regales him with the breakdown of today's achievements. How impressed Zola is at his flexibility, how long they spent on the balance bar, and what they plan for the rest of the afternoon to wind down. Will waits until he finally finishes speaking, and then - letting out a breath he's been holding - he swallows a little of his pride along with the bologna.

"I miss you," he says, and he can almost hear the sound of Hannibal's smile widening through the phone line.

"Then come home."

"I can't."

"You can, but you choose not to."

"I choose not to because we need me to keep this job."

The last four hours of the day pass at a snail's pace, and at four-thirty - having hurriedly completed the last minute job Patrick had given him only an hour before - Will finally manages to make his excuses and slide out the door.

When he reaches the house, all four of the dogs greet him in the front yard enthusiastically, and petting their soft fur he looks curiously at the front door which is standing a little ajar. It's unusual for all the dogs to be out of the house, particularly Ellie - who has taken to watching Hannibal like a sentinel of late - and stepping up onto the porch he pushes the door fully open with a cautious hand.

When he hears the raised voice of a man, his hand goes to his waistband almost on reflex, reaching for the gun that he's no longer licensed to carry. Pushing past Will's legs, Winston moves into the hallway stiff legged with his hackles raised and touching his fingers quickly to his back he silently orders him to sit. The voice is coming from the kitchen, and stepping towards the doorway silently, he moves to the side of it to listen.

Will's Russian is non existent, but he understands the tone of what is being said. The man - who he quickly gathers must be Zola's cousin - is asking her to come with him in an angry clipped tone, and his mounting anger at her is obvious when he suddenly switches to english.

"You'll do what I tell you, you hear?!! What would your mother say if I told her? Your father?" his tone is furious, "Tupaya suka!"

The words feel like a blow aimed at her, and at that Will moves forward into his eye-line. Zola's cousin is a large, heavy-set young man, his arms covered with Cyrillic tattoos, and when he sees him he immediately steps forward, glaring at his cousin as he does.

"Eto odin iz nikh?" he demands, and behind him Zola presses her hands to her face in distress and shakes her head.

"Nikolai - no, stop! I'm sorry. He came to get me. I told him not to, but his friend who lives nearby told him that you were…"

She shoots an anxious look past Will towards the bedroom, and turning his head he sees Hannibal sat on the edge of the mattress, his eyes preternaturally bright and clear as he watches them.

"It seems he told Nikolai that we are homosexuals," his lips twitch in the faintest of faint smiles, "And needless to say, he feels that his young cousin should not be exposed to our lifestyle."

Jerking his head in agreement with his statement, the young man bends and spits on the tile of the kitchen floor, and the sound it makes seems unnaturally loud in the small space.

"*Fucking* izvrashchentsy!"

Heat presses at the base of Will's skull like a hand, fingers spreading wide across his neck and burning into him like a brand. Staring into the other man's eyes, he can almost see the moment at which he realises that Will isn't quite who he imagined he was, isn't just some

white-bread middle-class pushover who he can intimidate with his muscles and tattoos. Straightening, he reaches his right hand towards the pocket of his jeans, but before he can move towards him Hannibal encircles his wrist from behind in a grip of iron.

"Will," he says softly, and once again the single word is layered with so much meaning that his whole body reacts to it.

Zola's eyes are wide with alarm. Reaching out with tentative fingers, she lays a hand on her cousin's upper arm, and pulls at him softly.

"*Please,* Nikolai. Don't make trouble for me. What does it matter what they are?"

Shooting a placatory look at Will, she tries again,

"They pay well. And you said yourself, we need the money."

"Not *their* money."

The younger man's eyes narrow again, and leaning towards him, he tilts his head.

"We don't take money from animals.*"*

Afterwards, when he thinks about it, Will doesn't clearly remember what it was that he said next, only that whatever words he chose caused the other man to take several steps backwards, and changed the expression on his face from one of sneering disgust to outright fear. He doesn't remember the words, but he remembers tasting his own blood in his mouth, coating his teeth, and feeling a warm fluidity in his limbs that is deliciously good, deliciously powerful, even as Hannibal's fingers dig into him to hold him in check.

Leaning forward to rest his cheek alongside his, the older man presses an adoring kiss to his temple and the coolness of his skin against him is like water-smoothed stone.

"Although I'm not entirely sure that that act is even physically possible, I should be fascinated to see Will try and accomplish it, Mr. Manusharov. But perhaps, rather than attempt to find out, it might be wiser now if you were to simply walk away?"

Supermarket

Zola returns the next morning, her eyes downturned and her fists clenched as she stands on the doorstep, and after the silence drags out between them for over a minute Will finally gives in and speaks.

“He can’t come back here. Ever again. You understand?”

“I have told him. I told him it’s none of his business how I make my money," her lip curls, "He's a svin'ya.”

“He’s your family Zola, and apparently he’s making it his business.”

“He can try,” she shrugs, spikily, “And I can tell the police about the pills he sells. The two kids he has strung out working street corners for him.”

Shaking his head, Will shoots a glance past her up the street and then back at the young woman looking at him with an expression of such fierce determination.

“Anything like that ever happens again, you’ll have to leave. I can’t have H…I can’t have him upset like that.”

Letting out a breath, Zola nods firmly, but he sees her eyes narrow, her head tilt curiously, and as Will moves aside to let her enter, he notices that she steps a little wider around him than usual. Clearing her throat, she looks back at him over her shoulder as he watches her.

“Are you going to work?”

“In a few minutes. We weren’t sure if you were coming back or not.”

“I said I would be.”

“And your cousin said you wouldn’t be.”

“He said a lot of things,” she looks at him more closely, “And so did you.”

Grunting Will, turns back towards the kitchen to retrieve his coffee, and after a moment the young woman follows him. Pouring her her own cup, he searches her face for a clue as to what she’s thinking, but all he sees there is curiosity, maybe a little suspicion.

“People say strange things when they feel threatened.”

“It didn’t seem like you felt that threatened,” her eyebrows rise a fraction, and she takes a sip from her coffee, “Neither of you did.”

Hannibal appears in the door of the bedroom, freshly showered and wearing clean sweats, and after giving Zola a slow unsurprised once-over, he turns his attention to Will.

“Will you be home at the usual time?”

There’s a dark glitter to his pupils this morning that the younger man can’t help but notice and wonder at, but he nods at him anyway.

“Would you be kind enough to pick up a few ingredients for our dinner tonight, if I give you a list?”

Hannibal’s expression is mild and relaxed, but Will can’t help but frown at the request.

“You’re cooking dinner? You really think you’ll feel up to it after Zola’s done with you?”

Inclining his head, Hannibal gives him one of those indecipherable looks he realises he hasn’t seen in some time, and then smiles softly.

“I would like to try. I’m not considering anything too taxing, if that’s what’s worrying you?”

Unfolding a piece of paper from his pocket, he extends his hand,

“I thought perhaps a traditional Stroganoff? In honour of our loyal ally here, Ms Manusharov.”

It seems as if Patrick has less work for him today at the engine shop than he usually does, or maybe - Will considers as he washes the grease from his hands - he’s been pushing himself so hard the last few days that he’s just done it all. It’s only just turned three pm but when he asks the old man if he needs help with anything out in the yard, his boss is quick to wave him off.

“Got a Morgan coming in tomorrow wants an upgrade to 40HP for the weekend, so you’ll have your work cut out for you. Maybe get an early night.”

Pulling into the supermarket parking lot on his way home, Will finds himself idly visualising what an ‘early night’ with Hannibal might look like. The previous evening had ended so badly that by the time he’d fully recovered from his confrontation with Nikolai, all thoughts of reprising their morning activities had gone with the last of his energy. That said, he had felt a little irked when - seeming to sense a need for space he didn’t recognise himself - Hannibal had gently suggested they spend the night in their separate rooms: ‘to recoup their strength’.

Perhaps making dinner for him tonight was Hannibal’s way of making sure his energy levels was well and truly regained before he attempted to *deplete* them again somehow? In the past, the meals he had made for him in Baltimore had often felt as if they might be a precursor to something less ‘collegial’ than they’d initially seemed, and the thought that tonight’s might end very differently brings warmth flushing to Will’s cheeks.

Taking the list the other man has made out of his pocket, he scans down the first few items and begins to fill his basket with the various vegetables and fruits he’s asked for - the mushrooms, shallots, the sour cream - before coming to a stop, dead in his tracks in the very centre of the aisle. The list contains a wide variety of unusual ingredients, most of which

he knows he doesn't have in the cupboards at home, but there's one glaring omission from it that - as he stops to consider its possible significance - brings a feeling like cold clutching fingers to his throat.

There is no meat on Hannibal's list.

Turning into traffic doing roughly fifty mph, Will's foot jams the accelerator of the truck down to the floor as he barrels his way the thirty or so blocks from the Wholefoods store to his home address. The front door - again - stands a little ajar, and as he virtually sprints from the driveway up the front steps and into the hallway, the four dogs mill confusedly around him. Hannibal is nowhere to be seen, but just inside the doorway of his room his Nikes sit neatly side by side with their laces tied, as if he has just that moment stepped out of them.

"Ha…!"

Will's mouth opens wide to call his name, but realising that he has no idea who is nearby he bites off the sound with a snap before it finishes.

"*Where are you?*"

There's a pause of maybe three or four heartbeats, and then - from just behind him - he hears a soft reply from the door of the bathroom.

"You're home early, Will"

Turning to face him, he takes in Hannibal's long sinewy body wrapped in his towel, the hard muscles in his arms and legs pumped solid from his day's physio, the awful gnarled scar at his right side, before his eyes finally track upwards to his face, at which point his brain just stalls out on him.

"You…you *shaved*."

Hannibal's lips curve upwards in a smile,

"I grew tired of trimming it," he says simply, and lifting a hand to his jaw he runs his thumb along the smooth line before inclining his head questioningly. The gesture is so achingly familiar it feels like someone slid a needle under his skin.

"Did you manage to get all the items for dinner?"

The pounding that had begun at the back of Will's skull in the supermarket is getting louder now, and shaking his head he closes the gap between them with slow deliberate steps before coming to a standstill.

"There was no meat on the list."

"No."

Hannibal's smile widens, and pushing a hand backwards through his damp hair, he reaches his fingers to Will's neck, strokes a line from his shoulder to his mastoid bone.

"Hannibal. *Why was there no meat on the list*?"

The older man's eyes glitter darkly, and resting a heavy hand on his shoulder, he leans in to brush his lips against the soft curved shell of his ear. His newly shaved skin smells like fresh lime and lemongrass, and Will can feel the heat radiating from his body, arcing across the space that's between them like electricity.

"Because Will, given the beautiful word picture you painted on the subject yesterday evening, I thought perhaps you would enjoy accompanying me to select the perfect cut for this dish yourself."

Everything

The abandoned building is down a narrow side street about thirty minutes drive from the house. At least Will guesses it's around thirty minutes, but somewhere in the part of his brain that is still functioning fairly rationally he imagines his sense of time may have been thrown out of whack. Either way, they reach their destination shortly after the sun has gone down, which seems just as well considering the fact that Hannibal - now freshly shaved and dressed in form-fitting black - now looks rather startlingly like an extremely well-known and recognisable serial killer.

"What is this place?"

Bringing the truck to a stop, Hannibal kills the lights. His profile from the side is sharp and striking in the blue glow of the dash, and Will can see his lips move as they soften into a smile.

"An old packing plant I believe. Long since disused. The locks on the two outer doors were all rusted solid, and the security cameras are inactive. Apparently there's nothing left inside that is worth protecting."

"And you discovered this when?"

"When I passed it last night, on my way to pay a visit to Mr. Manusharov."

The glow of Hannibal's eyes in the darkness is like a moon reflected on water, and Will finds himself looking back at him not even sure whether the other man is returning his gaze or staring past him into parking lot. The feeling is somewhat unsettling.

"Hannibal…just…explain to me how this happened? How have you done this? *Why* have you done this?"

Hannibal's brow creases in a slight frown,

"The 'how' I would have thought relatively simple to extrapolate. I went out after you'd gone to bed last night, drove to his address, waited for him to return home and then subdued him…"

"You *subdued* him?"

Will's voice is softly incredulous, and rubbing his hands over his face, he shakes his head,

"Hannibal…what if you were seen? What if Zola saw you? I…jesus she heard me threaten him. This is crazy."

The other man's lips twitch into an amused smile, and leaning forward he pauses for a moment to look at him before pressing a kiss softly to the side of his mouth.

"You're overthinking this, Will. Young Mr. Manusharov is a member of fairly notorious Russian crime syndicate - albeit a low-level one - with an extremely hazardous lifestyle, and there would be no reason for local law enforcement to consider the sudden disappearance of a local drug dealer as anything other than fortuitous," his eyebrows rise in a silent question mark, "But I imagine you know this already."

A laugh catches in Will's throat, and silently he struggles against letting it out. Hannibal's manner, the rhythm of his speech, even the way he's looking at him in the half-darkness, everything about him suggests that his own [beloved] monster is once again fully present, but for some reason he can't bring himself to ask if that is in fact the case.

So instead, he asks him something else.

"How do you want to do this?"

He's honestly kind of surprised at just how feisty Nikolai still is. After having been bound to a chair for almost twelve hours, Will would have thought that - by now - he'd have expended most of his energy trying to escape. The electrical cable Hannibal has used to secure him has bitten deeply into his wrists and ankles and his colour isn't good at all, but despite that he seems to find new reserves of strength when he looks up and sees the two men standing in front of him.

Spitting and snarling into his tape gag, he wrenches his body from side to side in a vain attempt to break the chair apart and free himself, but - tilting his head to inspect it - Will sees that Hannibal has chosen well. Steel-frame and built to last, it's also been bolted to the floor with four three-inch hexagonal bolts.

"He seems angry," Will says, and beside him Hannibal nods.

"I imagine the greatest casualty thus far has been his pride. He was particularly upset by my taking him from behind in his bedroom. As it were."

Will smirks,

"I'll bet he was."

Stepping closer to the struggling man, he drops to a crouch in front of him so he can see better his face.

"Your cousin tells me you've got kids working for you on street corners, selling drugs," he frowns, "That doesn't seem particularly *moral*, Nikolai."

The other man's eyes bore into him with a fierce intensity, and giving in to his curiosity Will reaches out and peels back a corner of the tape. Spitting and gasping furiously, the man lets go a vicious string of Russian expletives before finally reverting to English,

"*Fuck you faggot*, you don't know anything about me. I've seen shit like you wouldn't believe. You think you scare me, you and your big tough faggot friend?! Think I'd let my cousin work for scum like you now? *Fuck* you, you piece of…"

Reaching in to press the tape back over his mouth, Will regards him with a thoughtful steady gaze for a minute, before turning his head to look at Hannibal.

"Did you bring a change of clothes at least?"

Hannibal purses his lips softly,

"I did not. Forgive me Will, I fear my ability to consider the finer details of a plan may have suffered irreparable damage. It seems perhaps I may have to defer to you in this area in future."

He smiles at him then, showing his sharp teeth, and the heat that arced between them before in the bathroom crackles back to life. Standing, Will steps towards him and spreads a hand wide at his waist. Beneath the black sweater he's wearing he feels Hannibal's skin twitch, the muscles there contracting at his touch, and his lips part a little at the look on Will's face.

"I can think of one way we might keep our clothes clean," he says.

The first cut doesn't kill him. Or the third, or even the fifth. Watching the young man in front of them bleed out all over the dirt floor, Will finds himself fascinated yet again with just how deeply you can cut a human being without them losing consciousness, either through loss of blood or just an overload of pain. But then - he considers - as he circles their victim in exact counterpoint to his partner, both he and Hannibal are something close to experts in this particular area.

The light in the factory is dim - just moonlight and streetlights - but it's enough to illuminate the lines of Hannibal's naked body as he echoes his movements opposite him, his eyes alight with a look of complete adoration.

"Is this how you dreamed of it?" Will asks, and knows before Hannibal answers that this whole scene - the lighting, set, the victim, their bodies painted with his blood - everything has been fuelled by an image the older man has been holding in his head. It's a new vision, something he's never attempted before: a ritual killing perpetrated by two rather than one, but despite being rather hastily planned Will can't help but appreciate the raw beauty of his design.

"We circle our prey as one, cutting strategically, so we can both bathe in his blood as we do so. It's a baptism, and a…"

He smiles softly, suddenly understanding,

"*...And an exchange of vows. To be absolutely sure that what I want is exactly what you want."*

"And is it Will?"

Hannibal's voice is rough but deeply sincere, and Will can't help but wonder how - damaged as he is - he has been able to find his way back to this. As if who Hannibal is, at his core, has been as deeply seared into him as Mason Verger's brand and cannot be erased.

"You really have to ask me that question?"

"I do."

Hannibal's pupils are hugely dark as he comes to a standstill opposite him, the slumped figure of Nikolai Manusharov the only thing separating them, and Will can hear his breathing, shallow and a little fast, almost as if he's nervous.

"Because I want *everything* from you. Not only your life, but your heart, body and mind too. And I'm greedy, Will. I want it all for myself, forever, and all I can offer in return is the same."

"*All* you can offer…?"

"Yes."

Hannibal nods, and the slight raise of his chin and the shine of his eyes are the only indication of the emotion he clearly feels,

"Because all I am sometimes seems like a very poor exchange for everything that you are."

His fingers close over Will's upper arms, their skin meeting in a weltering wet slide of hard muscle and - from both their throats this time - come desperate, almost animalistic sounds of need. Biting down on Hannibal's lower lip, Will feels himself lifted and carried, his back hitting the concrete wall behind him with a force that almost drives the breath from his lungs. Hannibal's mouth is at his throat, while beneath him his fingers dig deep into the flesh of his ass as he holds him up, his cock pressed hard and hot against Will's own as he strains against him.

The position won't hold and after only a few more seconds, they slide and struggle, Will's feet dropping back to floor as he wraps both arms around Hannibal's neck in a familiar bloody embrace. The boards beneath their feet are cold and slick with the blood they've dragged with them, but nudging the other man backwards a half step into the warm pool seeping from the chair, Will smiles as he looks into the depths of his eyes, before reaching to press a hand to his heart.

And because he knows that he already belongs to Hannibal Lecter in every way that could ever seem possible, his answer isn't hard to find.

"Well I'll take it," he says as he kisses him.

Things People Say

Chapter Summary

**Basically just 1400 words of straight porn. Enjoy.*

They only make it around fifteen feet through the front door. For some reason either bedroom seems too far to go, and in the end it's just the hardwood floor covered by the rag rug against Will's back, then against Hannibal's when he flips him and knocks his skull against the floor with the ferocity of his kiss. Beneath him, Hannibal grins against his mouth, his fingernails digging into the small of Will's back as he pushes the shirt he's wearing out of the way. The blood they haven't yet washed away is still tacky on his skin and the fabric sticks to it.

"We should shower."

Hannibal's hips brace against him, lifting him an inch or so from the floor,

"Afterwards."

Will bites down on his lip, pulls a little,

"You like how it smells."

"I like how it smells on you."

Pressing his face into the curve of his neck, Hannibal inhales deeply before pressing his tongue to the muscle and licking downwards in a wide hot stripe. When he gets to Will's sternum, he softens it to a kiss.

"So is there more to this design of yours? Did you envisage anything else after your red wedding ceremony?"

Hannibal's eyelids are closed now, but Will can see the edges of his mouth, the slight smile playing there. Pulling at the hem of Will's t-shirt, he jerks it up and over his head and then spreads his warm hands at the small of his back.

"There is more, yes."

Lifting his head he places a kiss on the underside of Will's jaw, trails his lips,

"I have been giving…a great deal of thought to the idea of having you inside me."

The hot pulse of arousal that Will feels at his words knocks the breath from his lungs, and sends blood rushing to his head in a dizzying spiral. Groaning inwardly, he leans in against Hannibal's lips, now busy sucking bruising kisses to his throat, and tries to slow his crashing heart.

"I…that sounds…"

He breathes out, in again a little more deeply, chews his bottom lip bloody before he can bring himself to answer,

"Yes…that sounds…yes…I want that too."

They do make it to the bed eventually, although the procedure is a long and drawn out one, much like the slow preparation of Hannibal's body. Will has never fucked a man before, hasn't really ever given much thought as to how it might differ from sex with a woman, but pressing lubed fingers into Hannibal's oh-so-willing body is such a deliciously intimate act that there's no part of it he doesn't feel good or right about. Because he loves this man and this man loves him, and the reality of his carefully guided fingertips pulling gasps and breathless cries from his lips feels like just an extension of everything else that has passed between them.

Hannibal's hand cradles his jaw, dipping one thumb between Will's lips as he watches his face with an expression smeared with bliss, before reaching down between them to wrap his long fingers around them both.

"My Patroclus," he says, and his voice is minutely fractured, "How I've longed to see you like this. Bloody and magnificent, pressed between my thighs."

His eyes glow like liquid gold in the lamplight, and twisting his fingers a little deeper inside him Will smiles into them as he sees his pupils dilate, his throat contract.

"Patroclus died, and Achilles mourned him forever. I'd rather that wasn't us. I think we've mourned enough, don't you?"

Hannibal nods, and tightening his hand he strokes them both upwards with a slow measured pressure. The sensation of hot damp skin against skin is almost too much, and Will has to hold his breath for a moment, stall his own hand in its work.

"I remember that evening. Drawing them in the firelight while you watched me. It has the quality of a dream, and yet I know it was real," Hannibal lets out a tiny shaky breath, "In the dream though, I am a different version of myself. And you…you are a different you."

Leaning forward, Will rests his head against his shoulder. Pressed against each other this way it almost feels as if their bodies are merging, their combined heat melting them into each other, and he aches to complete the process somehow. Find a way to fuse them permanently.

"We are different Hannibal, we changed each other."

The other man's eyes shine, lips parting as he accepts the truth of it.

"Changing still."

"Yes, changing still."

Hannibal's hips hitch upwards, and pulling him down into a kiss he presses the soft blunt head of Will's cock to his entrance. The hot pulse of the muscle as he pushes into his body and feels him tighten around him pulls a deep, boneshaking groan from his chest, closely matched in volume by Hannibal's own. It's too much too fast, and again Will has to still himself and try to calm the breakneck speed of his heart, control all of the emotions that are thrashing around inside him.

He can't speak, he can barely move, and yet Hannibal seems to be demanding it. Straining up against him as he fights to push him deeper, his hands hard and insistent at Will's spine, and his mouth and eyes open, asking, beseeching him,

"*More…*"

And Will presses in until he's fully seated, twisting his neck sideways at the overload of sensation, the total mindfuck of being finally buried to the hilt within the man he loves.

Hannibal is trembling, but then so is he. He feels his hands smooth the length of his back before one tangles loosely in his hair, cups and cradles the back of his skull. Lifting his chin, he kisses Will's lower lip, upper lip, before softly licking into his mouth, deepening the kiss until the two points of contact between them feel identical: Hannibal tongue pushing into his mouth, his cock pushing deep inside him. Fleetingly, Will thinks of the kitchen again, the knife in his gut, the wet spatter of his own blood on the floor at his feet, and the two moments seem intermingled somehow, both agonisingly intimate and beautiful.

"I always wanted you," he says, and pulls back before surging forward again, the intense press and searing heat of Hannibal's body enveloping him.

"Like…this?"

"Any way I could get you. Wanted to be close to you, even when I didn't."

"Even when you were trying to kill me," Hannibal's face is flushed and his mouth is open, heat in his eyes as Will rocks against him, "My beautiful brilliant boy."

Will's shakes his head, tilting his hips with his next thrust, and knows he's on target when Hannibal's eyes are forced closed, his eyebrows knitting together in an expression of exquisite ecstasy.

"You remember that?"

"Remembered and forgotten. Forgiven," he sighs, groans softly as Will thrusts in again, "I imagine I could be persuaded to forgive you a great deal at this moment."

"I imagine you could."

They kiss again, little soft breathy bites at first that build to another of the deep hot kisses that blows Will's mind a little more every time, and before he knows it he's so close he doesn't know if he can stop, prevent himself from coming right this second. Arching his back, he drags his hips backwards fighting for his control, but Hannibal's hand is insistent and firm against the curve of his ass, his other hand wrapped around his own dick now, stroking tightly in time with Will's movements.

"You asked before if there was more to my design. There is. And this?"

His cheeks are flushed a deep red and little strands of silver stick damply to his forehead as, canting his hips, he pushes Will ever deeper, so deep that - as he comes - he honestly thinks sees atoms split. Neutrons explode. Elements fuse.

"This was always my...favourite part."

The Wrong Way

Will wakes tangled warmly in Hannibal's arms. The room is already full of sun, which he realises - in some kind of muted, hazy, out-of-focus way - is probably bad news. He should have been at work hours ago, but for some reason the dogs have decided to leave them alone this morning, the phone hasn't rung. Instead they have been permitted to lie in a warm, sex-smelling wreckage of limbs and wrecked bedsheets until well after eight.

The dried blood they'd never got around to washing off their skin now smells like old pennies, dusting off in flakes onto the mattress, and some small reasonable part of Will's brain suggests that perhaps spreading evidence of a murder all over his bedroom floor isn't the wisest move he ever made.

And yet…

And yet...

He rolls over under Hannibal's arm, presses his lips into the hollow of his throat to taste the combination of fresh sweat and coppery iron, and feels his dick twitch at the visceral sense-memory of the previous night. Buried in Hannibal's heat, with the taste of the man they'd killed still on his teeth. Like the bluff all over again, but with an alternative ending he'd never allowed himself to imagine.

Reacting to his kisses, Hannibal stirs, stretches, wraps himself tighter around and through him like a boa constrictor, before letting out a deep contented hum that vibrates through his chest.

"We overslept."

Will smiles against his skin,

"We did. I should have set the alarm."

"*Should* have, but did not. I wonder what prevented you?"

"I wonder."

Hannibal presses his chin to his chest to look down on him,

"Perhaps your subconscious was suggesting your morning might be better spent?"

"Perhaps my subconscious was preoccupied until well after three am."

The curve of his belly is cushioned against Hannibal's own, and unwilling to pull away just yet he pushes in closer, traces the angle of his shoulder blade with his fingers, the rough skin around Mason Verger's brand.

"I have to go in. Patrick needs me for an outboard upgrade."

“The whole day?”

He grunts an affirmation, but at the same time finds himself pressing lips to Hannibal’s chest, blunt teeth to his nipple. The older man sucks in a deep breath and the hand at the base of Will’s skull flexes, long fingers curling around his neck. They lie like that for a while, testing out different sensations on each other, until Hannibal's touch changes, morphs into something more thoughtful and careful.

“I remembered something yesterday afternoon. A useful something. It had to do with...Chiyoh.”

The sound of her name on Hannibal’s tongue is strangely jarring, and yet for some reason Will feels the need to hide how it bothers him to hear him say it. Instead, he presses his cheek to his chest and just listens to his heart beat. Slow and regular. Comforting in its familiarity. He thinks about the hospital. How everything was at least under control then for a while.

“I remembered that the last time I saw her, that I entrusted her with some items that would now be of great value to us. If we could find some way to contact her…”

“I know how to contact her.”

Will speaks the words into his skin, while cursing himself silently as he does so. But honesty is what’s needed now and going forward, and as Hannibal’s memories return to him he cannot be found to be keeping secrets from him.

“She sent me a card once. Maybe a week or so after you surrendered. There was nothing on it but a telephone number, but I knew it was hers. It smelled of gunpowder and salt plums.”

Hannibal laughs softly, and the sound resonates against Will’s ear.

“In my dreams of my childhood, she is like a sister to me. Trusted,” his chin nudges Will’s scalp, “Don’t you trust her Will?”

“I trust that she wouldn’t betray you. Me?” he grunts, “Me, I think she feels far less loyalty to.”

“Then we must assure her that the two are inseparable. Her watch over me must include you too now, or it is meaningless.”

His tone is so deeply sincere that Will has to raise his head to look him in the eye, just to make sure he really means it, but looking back at him the other man’s gaze is calm and steady.

“Touching as that sentiment is Hannibal, I feel pretty sure you’ll have trouble persuading her of it.”

“I did not imagine that persuasion would be necessary.”

Will gives a snort of laughter, and propping himself up on his elbow to look at him, he frowns a little at the blank expression on the older man's face.

"How much do you *actually* remember about Chiyoh?"

When he returns home that evening from work, Will knows immediately that she is in the house.

The faint lingering smell of jasmine in the hallway sets his teeth on edge, and shrugging off his coat he considers just avoiding the living room entirely, heading straight for the bedroom and a shower that he can spend half an hour in at least. Half an hour in which Chiyoh will perhaps take the hint, and leave without speaking to him. He's still standing in the hallway considering it when she appears in front of him, her own coat already buttoned to the neck.

"There's no need to worry. I'm leaving."

Her hair is streaked with a few more lines of grey than the last time he saw her, but otherwise she is unchanged. The porcelain perfection of her skin just as remarkable as ever.

"He seems well," she breathes out in what could almost be relief, "Peaceful."

"You make him sound like a corpse."

"He has died more than once. This last time, I had begun to wonder if it might become permanent."

Her lips press into a thin line,

"But then I heard that you had survived, and I knew he would never allow one without the other."

Will grunts, and they eye each other for a long moment with the same grudging respect that has always seemed to exist between them.

"I have given him everything he asked for. Anything else you need, I will have forwarded to Cayo Raton."

When Will looks blank, she gives a tiny frown of annoyance,

"The house in Cienfuegos."

"Ah."

The frown deepens slightly, and fixing him with an intense stare Chiyoh steps a little closer.

“He tried to hide it from me, but I know that his memory is damaged. He remembers only fragments of his old life - Mischa, the bloodshed, you - the parts that burn the brightest. The rest has fallen away to ash.”

Lifting her chin, she reaches to touch a finger to Will’s cheek and gently traces the jagged line there.

“The dragon that took a bite from you savaged him also. Are the two of you content now, both with your matching scars?”

“As content as two people like us ever can be,” holding her gaze, Will shrugs, “We belong with each other. We always have done.”

Chiyoh’s hand drops to her side, and she gives him a darkly sardonic smile,

“Belong? Or deserve?”

“What’s the difference?”

“The difference will only become clear as time goes on. One way leads to a place of acceptance, tranquility. Peace. The other…”

She lifts her sharp little chin again,

“The other is the wrong way. Believe me. I know.”

Turning away from him, she steps towards the door, her movements soundless just as they were in the woods surrounding her home. Her back is so straight that it’s hard to believe that she is old as she is, that she has known Hannibal for more of his life than he may ever.

“Did you believe you deserved to waste all those years, Chiyoh? Watching over him? That man in your cellar?”

Will’s words stop her in her tracks, her hand on the door handle, but she doesn’t turn to look at him. Only cocks her head like one of the birds she so skilfully stalked.

“I made a choice once, and then lived with the consequences of that choice. So in that way, yes. I believed I deserved it.”

“Could you have chosen to belong there instead?”

“Chosen my fate you mean? Like Sisyphus and his rock?”

She smiles, but it’s faint, like a watermark on paper,

“Perhaps. But by the time I realised that was a choice I could make, it was already too late. I had allowed myself to be consumed by bitterness.”

She opens the door and the warm night air spills into the hallway, and this time she does turn.

“You do belong together. I see that now. I thought before that you had…beguiled him somehow, found a way to make him foolish. Cage himself. But perhaps you have accomplished something no amount of bloodshed ever could,” and her eyebrow lifts in a soft arch of disbelief, “Perhaps your love has mended him."

Too Many

Chapter Summary

**This instalment is a tiny bit shorter than usual, because 1) I really need to get to bed before midnight tonight and 2) making it longer felt like extending this particular beat unnecessarily. Longer one tomorrow, I promise!*

The next couple of days pass relatively uneventfully. Zola reappears on the doorstep on the second morning, looking noticeably better rested and calmer than the last time they'd seen her. As she steps inside Will asks her politely how things are at home, and she shrugs.

"Nikolai took off. Some guys came looking for him yesterday, said he owed them money for the last lot of pills he had from them. I let them into his room and all his clothes were gone."

Listening to her, Will nods, marvelling as he does so at Hannibal's perfectly linear thinking, his unique ability to deflect.

"Are you going to be ok? If he doesn't come back I mean?"

Zola gives a little huff of derisive laughter, and looks down at the floor. She's a tough girl, there's no question of that, but now her expression has softened slightly.

"I can take care of myself. And I have a girlfriend wants to move in now he's gone. We can manage the rent together, the landlord doesn't care who pays," her lips twitch, a touch guiltily, "To be honest, I'm more worried now he *will* come back."

He can't tell her that she has nothing to worry about of course. That her cousin is unlikely to be reclaiming his ground floor apartment any time soon, or that the only way he's ever going to reappear in her life is if she happens to open their deep freeze while she's here. Watching her stretch out in the living room, smiling as she passes a joke in Russian with Hannibal, Will can't help but feel a strange sense of satisfaction at the unexpected result their hunt has produced. Zola's life has apparently been improved, there's one less pusher and abuser of children on the streets of New Orleans, and - last but definitely not least - the sex they'd had after slaying him together had been nothing short of spectacular.

Catching Hannibal's eye to let him know he's going, he leaves them beginning his physio for the day and makes his way to work. When he arrives Patrick is his usual mute self, and settling behind his workbench Will spends the four hours leading up to lunch in the pleasant act of stripping out the guts of an old 30HP motor and restoring it to working order.

He's just finishing his coffee and sandwich, and considering how best to break it to his boss that he'll soon be handing in his notice, when Patrick leans his head backwards out of the office and grunts his name.

"Call for you."

As he takes the receiver from his hand his mouth is still half full of bread, and he doesn't even bother swallowing.

"Wassup?"

The fact that he's fully expecting Hannibal's voice on the other end of line means that he's rendered momentarily speechless when instead he hears Bedelia Du Maurier's.

"Hello Will," she says, and the faint smile in her voice sends a shiver of revulsion rippling down his spine.

Dropping the remainder of his sandwich into the trash can beside him, he straightens up in his seat, eyes tracking Patrick's movement in the next room as he steps back and forth between the coffee pot and the window. He's not listening to his call, but he's still definitely within earshot.

"How did you get this number?" he asks, not even attempting to keep the hostility from his voice. A fleeting thought is battering at the inside of his skull like a moth against a window - that she'd somehow spoken to Hannibal first, gotten it from him - but then it's gone again. Paranoid. Insane. *Jealous*. That much hasn't changed.

"You're not the only one capable of using your understanding of people to draw logical conclusions Will."

Bedelia's tone is dryly sarcastic, and gripping the handset in his fist he curses his own stupidity for ever thinking he could play at being her client without realising she'd be storing every fragment of information he gave her for a later date.

"So what, you just called every single engine repair shop in New Orleans?"

"I narrowed the list down to exclude all but boat engine repair. I had a suspicion you'd want to reconnect with something familiar, grounding. So, just twenty three."

"Smart thinking."

He can hear the self-congratulatory smirk as she answers him,

"Yes, I thought so."

Patrick has finished his coffee, and giving Will a look that clearly suggests he'd rather he didn't spend too much longer on the phone, he goes back out to the yard. Alone now with just

the telephone and his barely contented irritation, Will can't help but spit his next words into the mouthpiece.

"What do you ***want*** Bedelia?"

There's a faint sigh on the end of the line, something like weary exasperation, and then the sound of Bedelia shifting in her seat. Maybe re-crossing those pretty shapely legs of her with their expensive designer shoes.

"Jack Crawford has been to see me."

A feeling not that dissimilar to the one he'd felt as the waters of the Atlantic closed over his head slowly pervades Will's body. Through the earpiece he can hear Bedelia breathing softly, ostensibly calm, waiting for him to react, and when he doesn't she continues.

"He said he was just passing by the house, an informal call on an old acquaintance, but he is nowhere near as good a liar as he believes he is."

Swallowing the bitter taste that is pooling in the back of his throat, Will forces himself to take deep breath, calm his heart rate.

"What did he say?"

"It was what he didn't say. He asked me when was the last time that I'd seen you. Face to face. Not spoken to you. ***Seen*** *you."*

She hesitates, clearly anxious about sharing what came next,

"And then he asked me…if I had ever had occasion to speak to your wife."

Something dull and metallic clicks softly inside Will's head along with her words, and leaning back in his seat holding the phone, he breathes inward deeply. It's just a stupid mental picture he knows, it means nothing, but he suddenly has the strangest sense that someone somewhere has turned over a timer, and that the sands are just now finally beginning to run through.

Bedelia's silence grows in intensity, and after a moment or two more she clears her throat in a minute expression of nervousness.

"In your opinion Will, should I be considering how best to protect my position going forward? Given what I have already sacrificed?"

Will laughs, and the sound is dry and harsh,

"**Sacrificed.** That's rich coming from you Bedelia. What exactly *have* you sacrificed? Your professional reputation remains intact. Your wealth improved."

He can't help the sneer in his voice now,

"Just how many of your nine fucking lives do you think you're down now?

The chill on the end of line is almost palpable, as is the burgeoning fear that is impossible for her to hide completely behind that elegant facade. Schooling her tone into one of implacable fury, Bedelia Du Maurier remains fiercely self-protective to the last.

"Too many," she says, and disconnects.

Remember

"How quickly can we be gone from here?"

Standing in the doorway of Hannibal's bedroom, Will is still a little out of breath from his sprint from the truck, not to mention the faster-than-is-strictly-safe drive from work. After Bedelia's phone call he'd quickly packed up his tools and then given Patrick a line about an emergency at home. The old man had looked downright pissed as he'd ducked out the door leaving the engine he'd been working on in pieces, but given the fact Will wouldn't be returning he figured Patrick's sour mood was of little consequence to him.

Glancing up from his seat on the bed, Hannibal takes in first him and then the four dogs milling and whining in a circle around him. A collection of papers is spread out around him on the coverlet, including - he notices with an unusual surge of gratitude towards Chiyoh - a pair of new passports.

"What has happened?"

Will clenches his jaw at Hannibal's question. Bedelia's words are still flitting around inside his head, and the tension he's been feeling ever since she hung up on him hasn't abated, traces of anger and jealousy and fear are still pulsing through his body like slow-acting poison.

"Jack Crawford knows that I called Molly that day from Bedelia's cell. I don't know how, maybe he pulled in a favour at AT&T, but he thought to ask questions about it which means he's suspicious of something."

"You spoke to Molly?"

Hannibal's voice is almost perfectly even, but there's the faintest trace of sharpness in it, like the note of a complex chord that's out of place. Will glares at him darkly,

"No, I spoke to Bedelia. She called the shop to warn me…"

He shakes his head, because no that's not strictly true,

"To warn *us*. I guess it's really not in her best interests now to see you captured again."

Watching him silently from the bed, Hannibal's forehead creases in a mild frown. It appears that he's considering something, although based on what evidence Will can't imagine. Hannibal's memories of his life and the sequential events that led up to his incarceration are still foggy at best. Yawning gaps exist between his many existences in Lithuania, France, Italy and the US, and yet he still somehow manages to maintain an innate sense of purpose that he is able to draw on.

"We have everything we need in terms of documentation, although it would be advantageous to our future security if we could make one stop en route to our final

destination."

Lifting a small object from the bed he palms it softly, as if re-familiarising himself internally with the story behind it.

"A safety deposit box that contains essential funds and a few personal items I would prefer not to leave uncollected."

"And this is where?"

Hannibal's golden brown eyes lift to fix on his own,

"In Baltimore," he says.

They pack the truck together. It doesn't take that long. In the time that Will has been back in New Orleans he's amassed almost nothing in the way of new possessions. The few clothes he's bought for Hannibal, some toiletries, the rest can be left. Kitchenware and bedding he chose without any real interest, a few pieces of furniture that made the place more comfortable. The work he's done fixing up the little house he figures more than pays Patrick back for the inconvenience of leaving him without a tenant for a while, and besides he's still owed this month's pay check which now he'll never see.

The dogs are more of a problem. Although they can eventually be shipped to meet them in Cuba - if they make it to Hannibal's mythical house - Will is loathe to leave them in boarding kennels without a definite end date in place, but it seems the only logical choice. Rubbing behind Winston's ears, he gathers the other dogs close as he crouches down amongst them on the floor.

"Sorry guys. I know this sucks but I promise it won't be for long. You know I wouldn't be doing this if I had any other choice."

Four pairs of trusting brown eyes track his face as he speaks, and swallowing the lump in his throat he gives each dog a last reassuring caress before standing.

Watching the ritual from the doorway, Hannibal's expression is amused but fond.

"I imagine after all you have been through together, they must be very dear to you."

"They are. Only wish I had as many people in my life as loyal."

Hannibal smiles,

"You have one at least."

Will gives a snort of laughter, but when the other man's expression doesn't change a pleasant warmth spreads in his chest at his words. Closing the gap between them, Hannibal cups his face in large hands, and leaning in he kisses him softly with that particular careful tenderness that surprises Will anew every time.

“I would be honoured to be considered as trustworthy a companion to you as Winston. As loyal an ally as Buster,” his lips soften against him, as he presses another kiss to his lips, “Or as loving as Ellie or Zoe.”

Sighing, Will lets his arms slide around his waist, and leaning into his reassuring solid warmth he breathes a laugh into the fabric of his sweater.

“I’m not sure how I feel about this metaphor. You as a dog. What comes next? You going to offer to fetch me my slippers too?

“No,” Hannibal’s voice is muffled against his neck, “But I would be more than happy to watch over you at night. Stay by your side always. Warm you while you sleep.”

Will swallows, his heartbeat quickening as he hears the fierce sincerity in Hannibal’s words, and feels the smile against the skin of his throat, the edge of his teeth.

“And hunt with me,” he says softly.

“Always, my love. Always.”

They lock the house up before dusk and drive to the place Will has found for the dogs. He tries not to get emotional, but it’s harder than he thinks. There are papers to sign, decisions to be made, and having removed his beard Hannibal is now far too recognisable to accompany him, so Will pays the fees and answers the questions alone. When he returns to the vehicle he feels hollow and raw, and wisely recognising his need for silence Hannibal closes his eyes and rests for most of the remainder of their journey.

It’s almost midnight by the time they pull into the parking lot of a motel just outside Birmingham AL, and after stretching his arms to ease the ache in his muscles, Will reaches over to touch the other man’s shoulder. Hannibal’s not asleep of course, and uncoiling from his position he is immediately alert.

“I could drive for a while if you’d rather continue?”

“No, we should rest. If we get going at first light, we should make it to Maryland by evening.”

Staring out through the windshield into the darkness, they sit for a while in silence watching the traffic as it speeds by on the i59. The soft hum is soothing, but Will can’t stop his thoughts drifting, imagining the timer still, the sands running through it.

“I can’t help thinking this is a mistake.”

In the darkness he feels Hannibal’s eyes turn on him, feels him considering his words.

“You see it as tempting fate.”

“I see it as an unnecessary risk.”

Sighing softly, Will flexes his hands against the steering wheel, his feet against the pedals.

“And I also...can’t help remembering how many times you’ve tempted fate in the past,” he shoots a sideways look at him, “Just because it amused you to do so.”

Hannibal’s lips thin, and in the low light of the dash he thinks he sees his eyes darken a little in a flash of anger.

“You are suggesting that I must have an ulterior motive for wanting to return to Baltimore?”

“*Do you*?”

He can’t keep the trace of suspicion from his voice, or the thread of fear that he knows runs just under it. Luckily for him though, Hannibal understands that the one is firmly rooted in the other, and reaching across he touches soft fingertips to his jaw.

“Will. I want nothing more to be away from this place. With you. In the house that I chose for us both. I have dreamed of it, our life there together, and when I awake from the dream I feel nothing but contentment."

He offers him the ghost of a smile,

"And I do not imagine that - once we are there - either of us will seek to leave our bed again for a very long time indeed.”

They undress inside in the light from the street lamps, and without bothering to shower the day from their bodies they fold themselves into each other like origami. Will’s fingers tug at Hannibal’s hair, nails scraping his scalp, as the older man presses kisses to the hollows of his hips, the line of the scar he made, before taking him in his mouth with sounds that speak eloquently of adoration and raw need. His hands trail patterns on Will’s ribs and belly as his throat closes around him, greedy for every inch he can take, and the fierceness of his hunger pulls an answering heat from Will’s core that quickly threatens to overwhelm him.

“I can’t…”

He breathes out the words in a desperate rush, and he doesn’t know what he can’t. Why he can’t. Whether there is anything he can’t do any more, and the realisation is so powerful that it sends his hands back to the other man’s head, gripping his hair, as finally he allows himself to be taken wherever it is Hannibal wants to go.

Song

Will dreams that Hannibal is singing to him.

The sea laps cool and azure blue around the hull of his little boat, and standing on the deck he is lashed to the mast. On every side the ocean reaches to the horizon, there is no other vessel or land in sight, nowhere for the song to be coming from, but still he hears it from across the surface. A single clear note like a bell that tugs at his insides, drags at the scar on his belly until it feels as if his entrails will be pulled from him again. He strains against the rough fibrous rope, the cord biting into his neck, his forearms, strains because he so desperately wants to throw himself from the deck. Sink beneath the surface to join forever with the one who calls him.

He tears and wrenches and the rope starts to give, flaying the skin from his arms, burning into him like a brand, but he feels no pain, only elation. He jumps, and the air is like warm breath against his face, before he is folded within the dark embrace of the sea.

Opening his eyes, the dim digital display of the motel room's clock greets him. 6:45am. Stretched out on his belly, he's found his way almost into the centre of the bed, his feet hooked over the end of the mattress. When he turns his head, Hannibal's pillow is empty.

Will folds himself into a sitting position. The traffic from the highway is low constant white noise, but under that he can hear other sounds. The clank of a garbage truck, some people talking in Spanish in the next room, normal motel sounds. He thinks of the dogs, wonders how they're waking this morning. Confused and anxious at their strange surroundings, and he bats the thought away with an irritable frown. No good getting sentimental. Dogs live in the moment. When they're together again, they'll forget.

Getting up, he goes to pee, turning on the yellowish bathroom light to look at his face in the mirror. The passport Hannibal has had produced for him shows his face heavy with a beard, but right now he dearly wants to shave it. His eyes look bright with anxiety, his face shadowed underneath from lack of sleep, but clean-shaven his scar would be more visible. He rubs his fingers through the hair and feels the ridged edge of it. Maybe when they're at the new house. Maybe then he'll let the sun at it.

The motel room door cracks open, and ducking his head out of the bathroom, Will sees Hannibal step through the gap. He's wearing the outsized track top that Will uses for running with the hood up, his sweats and Nikes, and is a little out of breath. When he sees Will standing naked in the doorway, his eyes fix on him with an almost palpable hunger, and the younger man feels his cheeks flush in response. It's a strange feeling to be so openly physically desired by someone, as if Hannibal is touch-paper ignited by the mere sight of him, but the slight stir of discomfort it gives him is more than outweighed by the spike of power he also feels.

Dropping a bottle of water and some fruit on the bed, Hannibal pushes back the hood of the sweatshirt with one hand and licks his lips.

"I put gas in the truck. Do you want to shower before we go?"

Will gives a small nod. Their eyes stay locked.

"See anyone?"

"No," the older man's pupils are dark and all consuming, like the ocean. "The gas was self service. The fruit and water are from the vending machine."

"What about when we get to Baltimore?"

"I will take care no-one sees my face."

"And this safety deposit box?"

"It's in a private location, not public."

Hannibal's eyebrow rises questioningly,

"You seem increasingly anxious, Will. Would it comfort you to know that we are booked aboard a private charter flight tonight? Leaving from Crisfield at quarter after midnight? And that…" he checks his watch, "Less than twenty four hours from now we will be landing in Cienfuegos."

He steps towards him, and without understanding why Will takes a small step backwards. Maybe it's a remnant of his dream, or the questions he still harbours about this final mission of his, but right now the idea of being reassured, held, touched, feels like more than his senses can handle.

"Let's just…" he nods jerkily, and scratches his fingernails through his hair, "Let's just take one thing at a time. I don't want to think about it or talk about it, until we're there. Until this part is over with. OK?"

He risks a glance up at him, and sees that Hannibal's features have settled into placid stillness, and although his mouth is faintly smiling his eyes are fathomless depths.

"Whatever you wish, Will," he replies quietly.

They split the drive in half this time, changing over every 3 hours. Halfway there they pull over at a truck stop to eat, but Will finds he can't stomach anything more than just water and fruit, and hunger clearly is not enough to tempt Hannibal with anything they have on offer. Fastidiously peeling an orange, he stares silently from the truck's window as the highway rips by on either side of them, appearing lost in thought, and when Will can't take it any longer he puts on the radio.

Three songs in, Hannibal reaches over and snaps it off. The resulting silence feels like a hand pressed over Will's mouth and nose, suffocating him, and then finally he speaks.

"Tell me, would you rather I had remained as I was when I awoke. Without my memories?"

Tensing his jaw, the younger man looks over at him. The brightness of his eyes is almost unnatural. They've always been on the reddish side of fox-brown, but in the late afternoon light his irises are almost ruby.

And it's a fair question, not as if he hadn't asked himself the same thing more than once.

"No, I wouldn't," he says quietly, and let's his gaze rest heavy on him for a moment, so he understands it's not an answer he came to lightly.

"What you've done, every beautiful, *terrible* experience you ever afforded yourself, pared and shaped you just like you pared and shaped that poet's heart in Palermo," he shakes his head, "How could I wish away anything that made you who you are?"

Hannibal's lips twitch, and his shining eyes slide away from him for a second out the window, before he recovers himself enough to look back.

"I made him for you. A gift."

"And it was beautiful. Awful and beautiful," Will sighs, presses his hand to the wheel, "And if I hadn't already forgiven you, I would have when I saw it. So much pain and anger and grief. It felt like looking at a part of myself, folded up, broken and moulded into your design."

"You were *never* a part of my design, Will."

Hannibal's reply is sharp, almost a rebuke,

"What you have become is something I could never have predicted. Would never have been able to imagine. A mind so boundless in its capacity for change that it fascinates me anew every day. With every new facet you reveal," he swallows, "I could not imagine a partner who matches me more perfectly…"

His voice trails off, and glancing at him Will tries to understand why it is that some trace of uncertainty still seems to linger in his features, around his eyes.

Taking his hand from the wheel, he presses the palm of it to Hannibal's cheek.

"I feel the same way. You know that right? You know this isn't something I'm just going to wake up from? That one day I'll just decide I'm done being half of…whatever this is?"

But instead of looking reassured, Hannibal only continues to look empty, lost. It's such a strange expression for him to wear, that after a moment Will slides a hand back into his hair and grips. Waits until he sees the minute widening of the other man's pupils that tells him he's being heard.

“I *love* you. I’m not going *anywhere* without you. And Hannibal? I will kill you before I ever let you go again.”

Impatience

Because they walk there on foot, through backstreets he doesn't recognise for well over ten blocks or so, it takes Will almost until the very last second of the journey to realise where it is they're heading. But when he finally does, he stops dead in his tracks, frozen to the sidewalk, his eyes fixed in complete disbelief on Hannibal's back as the other man walks on ahead of him. It seems to take a second or two for Hannibal to realise he's stopped, but when he finally turns around to look at him, the expression he is wearing tells Will everything he needs to know.

"You *can't* be serious?"

His voice sounds sharp even to his own ears, sharp with a side-order of muted, gut-wrenching fury, and he sees Hannibal react to it. Become even stiller. His own voice when he replies is almost entirely flat.

"I had Chiyoh enquire through a third party. The house has been securely sealed, awaiting the outcome of the many civil suits that have been brought against me. There is no reason to think there is anything but the most basic security system in place, to deter ghouls and trophy hunters."

The streetlamp above his head casts his eyes into deep shadow, deeper still in the hood he still has covering his head, and his hands drop loosely to his sides, the fingers flexing.

"If I had told you, would you have agreed to come?"

Furious beyond thinking, Will's words explode from his mouth,

"Are you fucking *kidding* me? No! Of course I wouldn't have agreed!" He mashes his knuckles into his eyes, "And what I'm trying like *hell* to understand is what *possible* motive you can have for bringing us here!"

Hannibal's mouth is a thin hard line,

"I told you, I have…"

"*Personal items*, yeah right, I got that. And these items are genuinely worth us risking everything for? Worth going back to the one place you're most likely to be recognised?"

He shakes his head again, still in utter disbelief at Hannibal's reaction, the calm implacable way the other man is looking at him: as if this was unavoidable, just something he needs to *suck up*. The silence stretches out and he stares and stares, waiting for him to shift, and when he doesn't he turns and draws his clenched fist back to his side. He feels like punching something, punching a fucking wall. Punching anything that would split his knuckles open and draw blood.

Drawing in a deep steadying breath, he turns back to look at him.

"Hannibal. The FBI *combed* your fucking house. Every inch. From top to bottom. They took *weeks.* What makes you think whatever it is is even still there?"

Hannibal's expression alters slightly, it might even be that there's a touch of uncertainty in it but Will cannot be certain. Either way, his voice still sounds the same. Immovable.

"Losing part of my identity changed the way I feel about the past, Will. There are few things I hold precious in this world, but I left something behind in that house that has troubled me ever since," he lifts his chin, resolute, "I need to recover it, before we can move forward."

A soft drizzle begins to fall, filling the air with wet static. Although it's not late the sky is already dark and people's house lights are coming on, runners starting their pre-dinner exercise. Dressed in generic track gear on a weekday evening in this part of the city he'd known they wouldn't stand out too much, but he still can't help but feel uneasy standing here directly beneath streetlights, two blocks from his murder-house with Hannibal *fucking* Lecter.

Moving quickly towards the other man, he takes his elbow firmly and guides them both off the road and into the shadows. They walk on for a while in silence, Hannibal matching his pace perfectly at his side, eyes looking straight ahead. They're still heading in the general direction of the house in Chandler Square, approaching it from the back, and Will can almost feel its location now, like a magnet pulling him towards it.

He's been back there a few times since that night of course. After he'd left the hospital, it hadn't been unusual for the security guard to see him there most afternoons, after the feds had left for the day. When all the cataloguing and clearing had been done, he'd often sit silently in the empty kitchen for hours, his back pressed to the door of the refrigerator, feet braced against the island.

Ironically, given the nature of everything that had happened there, it was one of only a handful of places he could truly feel at peace. And the *only* one where he still felt close to the monster whose heart he had so carelessly broken.

Together, they walk the perimeter of the back wall. It's topped with razor wire now, although it doesn't join to the brickwork at the sides, a fact he sees Hannibal spot immediately. Pressing a toe into a niche in the surface, the older man pushes himself upwards, gripping the top of the wall and pulling himself up to rest on his chest. It's a tough move for anyone, let alone a man who hasn't yet recovered all his physical strength, and Will sees his breathing coming in hard as he drags his legs up beneath him. He pauses before he drops down on the other side, his eyes seeking out his own in the half-darkness, and only when Will finally nods his tense assent does he turn and let himself go.

By the time he's calmed the thrashing of his heart enough to follow him over, there's no sign of him in the garden. Making his way along in the shadow of the wall, past the empty koi pond and Hannibal's roses now overgrown into a thicket of thorns, he sees footprints in the

grass leading towards the porch that surrounds the back door. When he reaches it, it's already open - the padlock that secured it neatly sheared in two and dangling from the bracket - and just inside, the control panel for the security system hangs open. Several wires are severed and below them a green LED panel is blinking slowly:

ERROR - REBOOT SYSTEM

For the first time since he came home that day to find Nikolai in their kitchen, Will badly wants his gun. Maybe it's the entry method, or the eerie silence of the darkened house in front of him, or maybe - hell - maybe it's being in the damned house itself again that's putting him on edge. Stepping silently through the unlocked inner door, he moves into the heavy gloom of the hallway. The air is warm and dry, the heating system obviously still in use, but when he stands perfectly still to listen, there's no sound to tell him what direction Hannibal's gone in.

He walks to the bottom of the carpeted stairs and puts one foot on the bottom step, before realising that he's never actually been upstairs in this house before. Even after Abigail died, when he'd been alone here, he'd never been tempted to go up and look around - see where Hannibal had slept, dressed, washed. For some reason it had always felt *rude*, as if being allowed upstairs required an invitation that had never been formally extended to him.

And now? Now he finds that he still feels strangely disinclined to go up in search of him, so instead he turns away to the kitchen.

As he enters the oh-so-familiar room, he's surprised to find that absolutely nothing in it has changed. Almost three and half years since he'd last stood here, and it's almost as if no time has passed at all. The glass door that Jack smashed with Hannibal's head is still fractured into two pieces in the frame. The splintered hole in the cupboard door, the dent in the refrigerator, all remain like commas in a sentence that has been endlessly repeated and retold, embedded in his memory, even though he himself had been absent.

Stepping towards the island, he places both his hands on the cool, brushed-steel surface and presses down. The unnatural stillness of the house is starting to get to him a little, and despite the fact that Hannibal was obviously correct in his assertion that the place is no longer of interest to anyone but the occasional drive-by, he feels a growing need to get out of here and on to their final destination as soon as is humanly possible.

And then.

There is the *smallest* sound.

So small that, were not the whole house deathly silent and his nerves so ratcheted up, he probably would never have even discerned it. A tiny soft clicking scrape - like the sound of something metal dragged against wood - and stepping towards the opening that leads into the dining room, Will's breath stalls in his lungs as he rounds the corner.

The dining table that he has sat at so many times - the same table where he once laid out his offering of Randall Tier - stands in front of him, the highly polished surface gleaming richly in the low amber light. At the head of it are three place settings, cutlery, plates, glasses, even a bottle of good wine, uncorked and breathing. And there seated at the head of the table, one hand casually pressing the muzzle of a revolver to Hannibal Lecter's temple, is - it appears - their somewhat belated guest of honour.

"Hello Will," Jack Crawford says quietly.

If

Even from where he is standing, Will can see that the safety catch on Jack's .38 is already off, his finger resting lightly on the trigger. Seated at his side, Hannibal looks typically composed - both hands placed flat on the table - although his eyes are cast down at his place setting, apparently unwilling or unable to look over in Will's direction.

"Hello Jack."

His words sound strangely flat and muted in the quiet dim room, but he sees Jack react to them, almost as if he hadn't expected him to speak. The muscles in the arm extended toward Hannibal appear to flex in readiness, and Will's heart lurches impossibly in his chest at the sight.

"What are you doing here?"

Jack Crawford's lips crawl back from his teeth, that same flint-eyed smile he used to give him whenever he was busy reminding him who was in charge.

"I might ask you the same question. Last thing I heard you were heading up North. Canada, Molly seemed to think? Somewhere on the coast where the hunting's good."

He raises his eyebrows,

"How's the hunting Will? Catch anything worth a brag?"

Hannibal is still refusing to look his way, and now that Jack's started talking he takes a chance and moves a step or two closer. Watching him, Crawford's eyes narrow a fraction, and - very pointedly - he flexes his trigger finger.

"I moved back to New Orleans."

Will spreads his hands out in front of him, to show him they're empty, and then steps a little closer.

"But somehow I'm guessing you already knew that."

"I didn't. And then last week your name came up on a report of a convenience store shooting. Myers over at the BPD, he still keeps me in the loop on things, things that might interest me. He didn't think there was anything to see, but then I look at the report and - hey - there's an address there! And I think, it'd be good to look in on old Will. See how he's doing now, especially since that email address I keep sending to doesn't seem to work anymore."

He gives his head a little sardonic shake,

"You know, after it was all over, I just could never shake this feeling that that story you told - about flagging down a car on the highway - just didn't add up. No-one reported

seeing you or helping you, it was the only part that made no sense. And if there's one thing I learned working with you Will, it's to ask questions when things don't make sense."

His voice grates a little over that part, all the many ways he has disappointed and continues to disappoint Jack Crawford are contained within every syllable, and Will feels his skin prickle with a familiar anger.

"So just because I gave a false address, you decided to start poking again?"

Gritting his teeth, Will takes another step closer, takes a chance that Jack is more angry with him right now than he is righteously homicidal.

"What part of 'leave me alone Jack' didn't you understand? My suicide attempt not convincing enough for you?"

Jack's eyes open wide in disbelief, and for a moment he thinks he's going to take the gun off Hannibal and point it at him in his place, but instead he extends his arm an inch further and presses the muzzle forcefully into the other man's temple. To Will's surprise, he sees Hannibal flinch minutely.

"You save the life of a multiple murderer. You lie about it, you aid and abet his escape and you're *seriously* suggesting I'm the one in the wrong here? You're seriously standing here now in this house, with this man, and saying that?"

"Jack…"

Hannibal's voice is rough and uneven, but Crawford cuts him off at one syllable,

"No. You don't get to speak. You're done here."

His hand flexes on the grip of his pistol and Will can hear a hammering in his ears, like the sound of the sea as it crashed over them.

"You owe me, Jack!" he shouts at him, because it's all he can do, "You owe me. I was fine, I was fine in my lecture theatre and you came and you pulled me into your…your fucking *never-ending nightmare.* You leashed me…you used me…and you watched as it ruined my whole fucking life. You *owe me a life*, Jack. You owe me a new life."

It sounds flimsy even to his ears, desperate and pleading, something he knows Jack Crawford despises above anything else, but he can see how his words affect him, dig in under his skin like barbs. Deep down, under the righteous anger, he's still as guilty as hell and finally tasting blood in the water, Will steps in to deliver the killer blow.

"What would *you* do for a new life, Jack? If you could be with Bella again?"

The split second of fury is all he needs.

Because he's dreamed of this so many times. In the weeks and months and years after that night, he would play the scene back and forth in his head on an endless loop, asking himself the same question over and over and over again.

What if...?

What if...?

What if...?

What if he had told Jack that it wouldn't work, that he was wrong? That he couldn't do it.

What if he had told Hannibal everything, admitted his part? He knows, knew, had known that he would be forgiven. That Hannibal wanted to forgive him.

What if he'd come earlier that night?

What if he hadn't called first?

What if - instead of destroying each other - they'd just waited for Jack, waited for their guest of honour, just as they'd planned?

As he slides the Dragon's blade from his right hip pocket - from the place he's kept it ever since he picked it out of a pool of his own blood - his eyes are only for Hannibal, their purpose finally fused, a singular organism now moving as one. As the one captures his hand, imprisons his arm, the other draws the blade across Jack Crawford's throat. Warm blood gushes over his hand, spatters over his chin and cheeks as it has in a thousand versions of this scene that he's played himself, but looking into Hannibal's eyes Will doesn't feel horror or fear, only a very clear, very definite sense of *rightness*.

Because this is how it always should have been. This is the ending he'd denied them both that night, the period he'd never added to their story.

They hold him like a loved one until it's over, and then gently they let him slide, his heavy body slumping back in his chair as if he is sleeping. His eyes are closed, his face strangely serene, as they both stand either side of him, blood-spattered sphinxes lost in each other's eyes for the longest time.

Sucking on his lower lip, Will passes his tongue over the surface,

"This morning. You called Bedelia and told her we were coming here."

Hannibal's cheekbones shine scarlet in their coating of blood.

"Yes," he says softly.

Will cocks his head,

"Did you *tell* her to tell Jack?"

"I told her to expect us for dinner this evening."

“Knowing she would tell Jack?”

“Hoping she would tell Jack.”

Will hums, nods. Closing the knife in his hand with a soft metallic click, he puts it back into his pocket. Back where it belongs.

“You had to know,” he says.

Hannibal’s mouth twists and tears shine in his eyes. He doesn’t move to touch him, but Will can see how badly he wants to. How hard he’s working to hold himself back.

“Yes. I am sorry Will.”

His chin trembles, strands of silver hair sticking to his red forehead, and Will thinks he has never looked more beautiful. Reaching out he cups the other man’s face, he strokes a thumb along his jaw,

“Don’t be sorry. I’m glad you did it. He would never have stopped looking for us. And it wasn’t just you that needed to know. It was me too.”

He kisses him and feels Hannibal’s breath in his mouth - a deep outward sigh of relief - before he returns the kiss, the hands in Will’s hair drawing him in with a hunger and passion he knows they definitely don’t have time for.

“We need to leave,” he says pressing him backwards, and is momentarily surprised to find that - right now - he is the one in control here, the one reminding them both they have someplace else now they badly need to be.

Hannibal’s expression is still hazy with adoration as they make their way together back through the kitchen and out into the hall, but then - just as they’re about to slip out of the house the way they came in - he pauses and catches at Will’s arm as if he’s just awakening from a dream.

Together they climb the stairs to his bedroom. The room is largely empty now, the remaining furniture covered with dust sheets, but walking over to the fireplace the older man reaches a hand to the marble surround and digs his fingers into the block work in the centre. Carefully removing a section of the stone, he reveals a small black safe.

“There are few material things I have of value in this world, Will. All my life, I have tried to live without attachments, without people or things that I feared losing. But then I met you, and I finally understood that there is something greater than the pain of loss. That makes the possibility of it worth enduring.”

Unlocking it and reaching into the dark hollow, Hannibal draws out a small cloth bag, and taking Will’s hand he gently shakes the contents of it out. Two heavy gold bands, inscribed with an intricate pattern of snakes and leaves glint softly in the low light of the bedroom.

“When I killed the men who killed my parents, I took these back from them. They are all that remains of my family - my father and mother, and of Mischa - all that remains of my old life.”

He swallows, and Will can see the emotion clearly etched into his face in the semi-dark as he gently slips the larger of the two rings onto his finger. Presses a close-mouthed kiss to his knuckle.

“Forgive me for an old fool's sentimentality, Will. But I did not wish to begin our new life together without them.”

One Hundred Years

By the time they leave the house and make it back to the truck, the moon is high in the sky. Huge and deep orange in colour, Will can't help but smile as he looks out and sees it hanging there above them.

"Hunter's Moon," he says.

He glances across at Hannibal, and the other man's lips curve upwards in an echo of his expression, although his eyes remain on the road ahead of them.

"In Lithuania it's known as a Kruvinasis Mėnulis - a 'bloody moon'. Which, given the current state of our attire, would seem even more appropriate."

Will gives a soft laugh, and reaching down he touches a finger to the ring of etched gold he is now wearing on his left hand. He finds that he likes this one better than his old wedding band, although maybe he only feels that way because - in the driver's seat opposite him - Hannibal is wearing one that exactly matches it.

The small movement draws the older man's eye, and looking across at him his smile widens,

"I must apologise for not making you a more formal proposal, Will. Perhaps you will allow me to compensate for that somehow…at a later date?"

And Will shakes his head, gives him a wry frown,

"Fine. Just as long as it doesn't involve more human topiary."

They drive in silence for a while, the lights of the city intermittently casting the other man's face into deep shadow before softly illuminating it. Watching the play of colour over Hannibal's features, Will feels a tightness in his throat as he experiences a sudden sharp echo of the fear he'd felt seeing the gun pressed to his temple.

"What if he'd just killed you?"

He sees Hannibal's mouth move, a soft thoughtful frown, and his fingers on the steering wheel shift their grip.

"On sight you mean? I had considered that possibility."

"And yet you still went."

"I was reasonably confident he would not," he tilts his head, looking at him, "A man who has hunted his quarry so diligently for so long does not rush the final shot. He savours it like a fine wine."

Staring past him out the window, Will shakes his head, even though he agrees.

"He'd savoured it before though. And missed you. Twice."

Hannibal nods,

"He did not learn his lesson it seems," he says quietly.

"No," and the word is bitter on Will's tongue, "No. Some people never do."

The truck stops at an intersection, and suddenly becoming aware of their location within the city, the younger man hesitates for a moment before reaching a hand to touch Hannibal's forearm. The skin is warm and still faintly speckled with dried blood, and when his fingertips brush the soft hair there he feels the other man shiver.

"What time did you say our flight was?"

The light is on red, but Hannibal isn't even looking at it now. Instead his eyes are fixed on Will's face, his lips slightly parted in sudden anticipation.

"A quarter after midnight. Why?"

And Will can feel that the smile on his face as he replies is pure Hannibal now, pure monster,

"I thought perhaps...we might still have time for dinner?"

The chimes of the doorbell are dying away for a third time when - from some distance away inside the house - Will finally hears the sound of footsteps approaching. Although obviously slow and reluctant they are nevertheless steady, and when they reach the other side of the door there is only the briefest of pauses before it opens.

Her hair and makeup immaculate as always, Bedelia Du Maurier's cool, softly spoken welcome is every bit as perfectly styled.

"Gentlemen. I had begun to wonder if perhaps you'd reconsidered."

Her eyes move first to Hannibal - still bizarrely incongruous in his blood spattered running gear - before drifting sideways to lay heavily on Will.

"I do apologise for our appearance Bedelia. We're not exactly dressed for dinner I'm afraid."

"No. You are most definitely not."

Bedelia's pupils widen only fractionally at the blood-stained front of Will's own sweats, the arms virtually black from the wrists to the elbows with Jack's blood. Stepping back from the threshold, she drops her arm and motions for them both to enter.

“I took delivery of a package earlier today, which I now imagine you might find quite useful.”

Her ice-blue eyes fall to fix on their blood-speckled trainers for a moment, before she steps away from them down the hall to retrieve a large flat box from the table. As she walks back, her heels are marginally less steady on the tile.

“Such foresight, Hannibal,” she arches an eyebrow, “I feel as if I should be surprised. But somehow…I am not.”

Her smile is like glass, thin and sharp, and as Will steps in to take the two suits of evening wear from her, he notes with some relish the moment it cracks.

“Oh there’s still time Bedelia,” he says.

It’s not the perfect engagement dinner, but it’s pretty close. And when he thinks back on it afterwards, Will finds it hard to pick his favourite part. Watching Dr Du Maurier’s eyes as she fades from consciousness - gaze fixed on him as Hannibal presses the chloroformed rag to her face - *is* extremely satisfying, but the coup de grace has to be her expression when she finally comes round.

The roast looks stunning of course, as does the table, but he knows that isn’t the sight that really captures her attention. Will has always (privately) thought Hannibal looked *especially* devastating in black tie, but what he hadn’t counted on was how well it might look on him, or what a truly stunning couple they would make together.

Opening her eyes blearily, Bedelia takes a moment or two to focus on them, before her lips part in a pantomime of speechless horror.

“Oh my *god*,” she breathes, as she takes in first the suits, then in a long trailing gaze, their laced fingers, their matching wedding bands.

“And here I’d always believed you an atheist, Bedelia,” Hannibal says.

After dessert, when Will has finally caved to his basest instincts and choked the life out of her, they make a toast.

“To absent friends.”

Hannibal’s smile is amused and fond as he too raises his glass, and taking a sip of the dark wine, Will gives his head a tiny shake of appreciation at the taste. Rich and heavy, it coats his tongue with a heady mix of flavours, spice and aged grapes.

“Wow. This is incredible.”

“It’s port, bottled in 1916. A rare Lithuanian vintage that my father favoured.”

Hannibal's eyes glow, and leaning in, he licks the taste of it from Will’s mouth,

“He drunk it at his engagement too.”

He licks his own lips, and the ravenous look in his eyes sends a hot spike of arousal through Will straight to his dick. Placing his glass on the mantle, the younger man reaches in to carefully un-tie his bow tie, delicately undo his two top buttons, before softly pressing his mouth to the side of his throat.

“You really are a hopeless romantic Hannibal, d'you know that?”

He feels his pulse then, jumping like a living thing under the surface, and slowly - using just the edge of his teeth - he bites down until he tastes blood. The older man’s breath catches, and there’s a touch of reproach in his voice as he replies, one hand tugging at the curls at the base of Will’s neck to bring his head back. His mouth within reach of his.

“Hopeful, Will. Now. I can assure you. I am a *most* hopeful romantic.”

THE END

(well...almost)

What I Wrote

In the summer, there are - in fact - white egrets.

It's maybe the second week in August when Hannibal first spots them, and as he walks back up the narrow cliff path from the beach to the house he can't help but hurry a little, so much so that Buster becomes over excited and - trying to scramble past him - almost trips him up. It's a blisteringly hot day and Hannibal is barefoot, so it's only by virtue of his superior sense of balance and hugely improved core strength that he able to stop himself toppling over the edge.

When he recovers himself, perspiring even more than he had been before, the terrier is warily eyeing him from a distance away, one paw raised, ready to take flight if need be. In the shade of nearby tree, Ellie and Zoe merely watch them both with interest and pant.

"You…" Hannibal says with great feeling, "Are a very excitable small dog. Who would do well to remember who feeds you morcilla whenever he makes it."

They walk the rest of the way at a normal pace, which is just as well considering how slowly Ellie moves in the heat. A hundred metres or so from the house Hannibal finally gives in and carries her like a baby, a sight which sends Will into convulsions of laughter when he spots them approaching from the patio.

"And you wonder why she's fat?"

"She was moving too slowly."

"Because she knows you'll carry her!"

Walking towards him, Will takes the little Havanese from his arms and sets her down on the tile with a smirk, before shading his eyes to look at him. Hannibal's skin is a deep rich golden brown, his hair lightened to silver by the sun, and the look the younger man gives him as he stands there in nothing but his Speedos is nothing short of lascivious.

"Did you run up here? Why are you so sweaty?"

"It's hot."

Will grins, nods, steps in to run a fingertip along his collarbone before dipping his head to taste with his tongue.

"It's always hot."

Hannibal hums his amused agreement, and resting his fingers lightly against Will's sides, he lifts his chin, allowing him to press in further.

"The egrets are back," he says, and Will chuckles softly against his skin.

“You and your damned egrets.”

“It was one of the main reasons I took the house.”

“Uh huh…” Will kisses the underside of his jaw, his chin, “That and the red tiles. I know. You told me like a thousand times.”

Hannibal sighs, turns his head so the kiss aimed at his lips misses entirely,

“What it is to be married to a man with no aesthetic sensibilities.”

“What it is to be married to an inveterate snob.”

It’s become their habit during the summer months to go back to bed around midday, although - as Will has been apt to point out - Cubans are some of the only Spanish speaking people who don’t observe the tradition of ‘siesta time’. That said, it’s not as if they rest a great deal while they’re there. The air-con in the bedroom isn’t great, but that never stops them from rolling each other around in the sheets, both working up even more of a sweat than they would if they were outside poolside.

They make love like they kill now, no holds barred, using their hands, teeth, brute strength, anything that feels good or right in the moment. But just like killing, it’s the moments of silence and stillness within the act that forge the real beauty. Beauty that comes from the moments when they are reduced to wordless touches, soft pressing kisses of adoration and whispered, worshipful endearments that are reserved only for this space.

Hannibal’s hunger for Will seems an unquenchable thing, ever expanding rather than abating, as if the other man were the only source of sustenance he now requires. Although they often talk of slaking different appetites, he finds that he rarely meets people he considers rude these days. And when he does, they often seem to him now far more pitiable creatures than they do edible ones.

And Will? Will continues to surprise himself. There have been many times over the length of his lifetime when he genuinely doubted he even had the capacity to feel consistent, sustained happiness, privately considering himself a twisted thing, with a psyche too knotted and scarred to ever fully heal. Finally allowing himself to fully accept Hannibal’s love and devoted attention is like letting someone apply balm to old wounds, and as the weeks and months pass he imagines that he feels every knot inside unravelled, smoothed out by his careful, clever hands.

He is loved and feels love like he could never have imagined in return: fiercely possessive but impossibly sweet, impossibly tender, so much so that Will sometimes finds that he - rather than Hannibal - is the one who needs reminding just who the man he loves truly is.

One afternoon, while unpacking one of the numerous boxes Chiyoh has recently forwarded them from the house in Lithuania, Will finds a small hardback notebook filled with a childish but unmistakable version of Hannibal's handwriting, and when he returns from his daily swim he shows it to him.

Taking it from his hand, the older man's face breaks into a delighted smile,

"Did Chiyoh send this? I had thought all my schoolbooks were lost."

"It was in amongst that box of poetry books. Is it some of your own poetry?"

Hannibal's gives a small nod, his expression becoming suddenly almost self-conscious,

"I'm afraid I was rather a pretentious child. I harboured delusions of grandeur that I too might some day attain the fame of masters like Baudelaire," he flips through the pages and grimaces, "It's mostly sentimental nonsense. I am almost grateful it is more or less unintelligible."

Laying a gentle hand on the nape of his neck, Will leans in and presses a kiss to his temple. The skin there is soft and salty, warmed by the sun, and beneath the surface Hannibal's pulse is always fluttering.

"Read me something."

"Will…"

"C'mon. I want to hear what was in little Hanni's head," he lifts an warning eyebrow, "Unless… are they poems about girls you were in love with?"

Hannibal breaths a laugh,

"No, Will. They are not. In fact most of them appear to be sonnets devoted to some mysterious woodland creature, an imaginary companion that I liked to imagine my counterpart."

Flipping open the notebook again, he smiles as he scans the verses.

"Stop smiling and read," Will says, and nudging him backwards into a seat, he hesitates for a moment before settling himself across his lap, one arm draped around his still-damp neck. Beneath him, Hannibal shifts backwards against the cushion, before leaning to kiss the skin beneath his ear, press blunt teeth to his earlobe.

"Will, do you not think there are some parts of my past that could remain private? I still remember so little of it, must what I do remember always be dragged out into the light in this way?"

"Man. These poems must be *really* bad."

Hannibal gives a soft, self-deprecatory laugh against his skin,

“They really are.”

“So you’re not going to read them to me?”

Will responds to the teeth with a little grunt of pleasure, but still resists a little when Hannibal tries to slide a hand under the waistband of his shorts,

“Now you’re just trying to distract me. Get my mind off this mysterious soulmate of yours.”

“Will…”

And Hannibal’s voice holds that same softly reproachful tone it did the night he’d proposed to him with his father’s ring.

“Never in even my most fanciful childhood imaginings could I have conjured up a more perfect partner for myself than you. And had I even a fraction of the talent that I imagined I had, I would never - in a thousand volumes - be able to do justice to your matchless beauty,” he kisses the underside of his jaw, “The glittering treasure that is your mind. The glorious darkness of your heart…”

Will sighs, and the hand that is preventing Hannibal fingers from advancing further, moves away. Rolling his neck sideways, he grins as the other man opens his mouth and - biting down in earnest now - expels a low feral growl that vibrates through his chest and hardens his dick almost instantly.

“Well, that’s all very well Dr. Lecter,” he says into the shell of his ear, as he thrusts forward into the tight fist that Hannibal has made round him, “But who’s a guy got to fuck around here to get a sonnet written about him?”

THE *(actual)* END

End Notes

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